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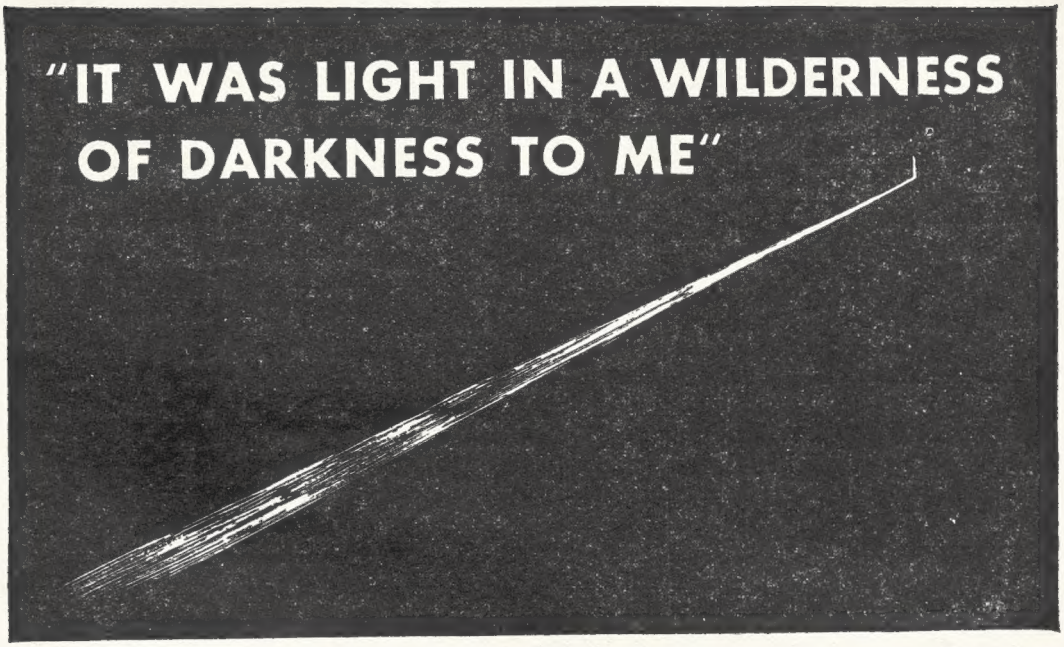

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Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

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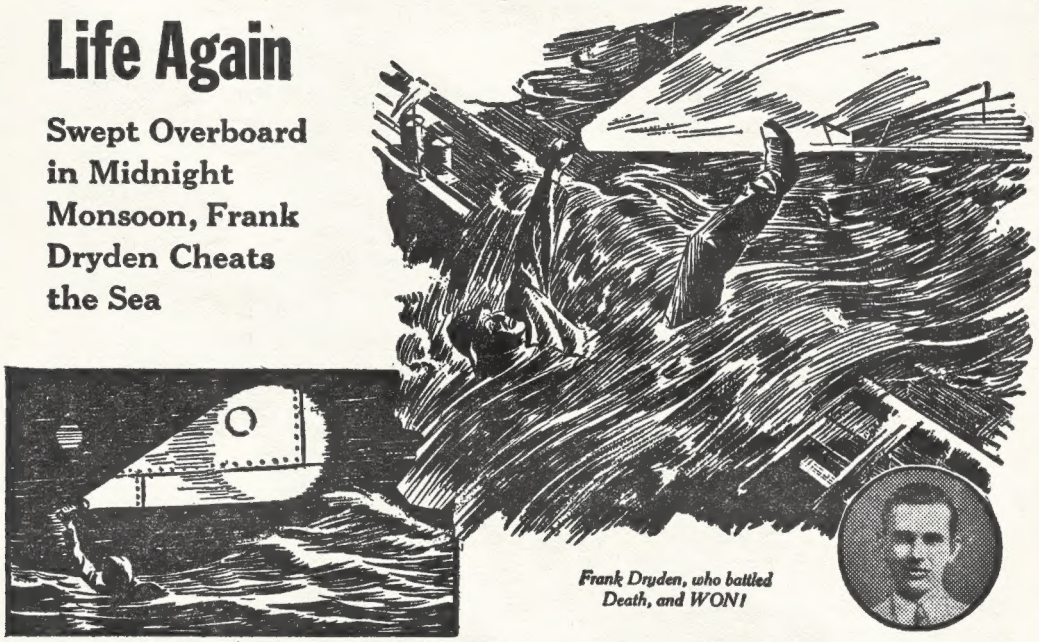
30 Minutes with Davy Jones...and Back to Life Again

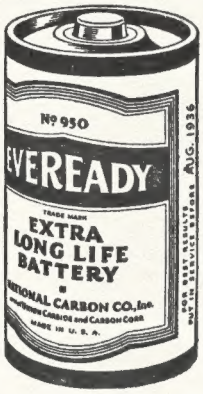
Swept Overboard in Midnight Monsoon, Frank Dryden Cheats the Sea



Frank Dryden, who battled Death, and WON!

"It's almost midnight," writes Frank Dryden. "A terrific wave comes over and sweeps me with it over the side. I freeze to the flashlight I'm holding, but I'm dressed for heavy weather. Oil-skins and sea-boots are pulling me under. To get out of them I have to hold the light under water. If it goes out, so will I. But I have to take that chance . . . Then the whistle blows . . . They can see my light!

"For 30 minutes I fight to stay afloat . . . Every minute I expect my light to go out . . . a shark to devour me. Then the ship manoeuvres alongside. It's too rough to launch a boat . . . they throw me a line . . . somehow I get it around me. Once on deck I check out, and my shipmates tell me they have to pry that flashlight out of my fingers . . . And by the way, it was still burning. After months of daily shipboard use, those Eveready batteries had the strength to see me through. Because they were *fresh* when the mate bought them, I am able to give you my story today."



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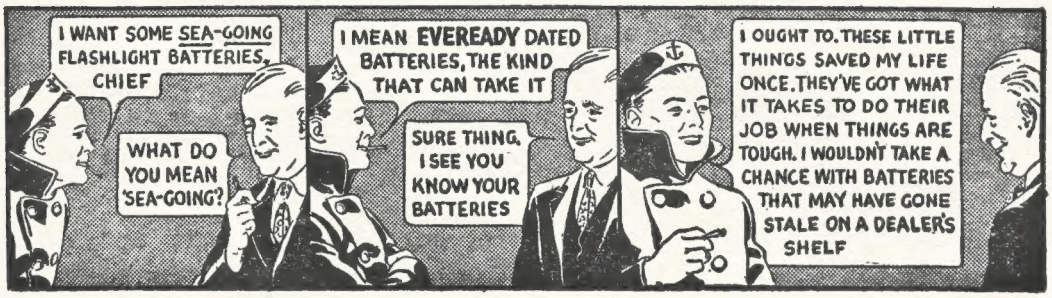
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SURE THING. I SEE YOU KNOW YOUR BATTERIES
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EVERHARD

CHAPTER I

BAIT FOR A MAN

THE fat doorman in gloves and a long-tailed blue coat opened the heavy door of the Hellenic Hall and bowed low. The man in the dark suit that had a sheen of silk was a stranger but looked as if he belonged. He carried a stick, had a new hat, and the manner; was not young, had a cropped black mustache, dark alert eyes.

He got out on the eighth floor, was guided by a gesture from the elevator pilot, walked along the hall to a corner apartment, rang the bell.

An old Chinaman, wrinkled as tripe, opened the door, bowed with up-lifted eyes.

"Mr. Donald Richmond, if you please."

"Who I say want see him?" asked the Chinaman.

The man took out a card case, drew a pencil, wrote neatly on the back of

A Novelette
By GORDON YOUNG

the card. The card said *Mr. Theodore Wilkins.*

"You come in, have seat."

Mr. Wilkins gave an appraising glance at the very fine copies of Rembrandt on the wall of the entrance hall, kept his hat and stick, followed the Chinaman, sat down.

Mr. Donald Richmond had a large apartment. The Chinaman went through a narrow hall, opened a door.

Mr. Donald Richmond, better known as the notorious Don Everhard, was having breakfast at eleven o'clock with a very pretty girl, his cousin, and with his chauffeur, who had a broken nose, looked fat but wasn't. Mike was a wrestler.

Everhard took the card, turned it over, read: *Mr. Borgan asked me to call on a matter of extreme importance. Wilkins.*

"What's he like, Kang?"

Kang Ko shrugged a shoulder. "You go see. You smart man, maybe."

Kang had been in the Richmond fam-

ily for forty years, spanked Everhard as a child, still took liberties.

Everhard said, "Um," understandingly, got up. "Excuse me, Helen."

As soon as he had gone the pretty young girl snapped her fingers. "All right, Kang. Bring some brandy. This coffee is terrible."

The burly Mike said, "Aw, Miss Helen.

"Just because he doesn't is no reason why I shouldn't!" She tipped the decanter of brandy that Kang fetched, poured a thimbleful into her coffee. "You know why he doesn't touch it, don't you?"

"Sure. Cause he wants to—to—he wants to keep his nerves steady and—"

"Ah, he has no nerves. I'll tell you. Our grandfather was a great old boy. A forty-niner with a great big family on a great big ranch. Used to get drunk. Once when he was half drunk a tin-horn gambler in San Francisco taunted the old man into drawing a gun, then shot him. The law couldn't touch the tin-horn. Self defense! Well they hadn't much more than got through burying grandfather when a boy—just a sixteen year old kid!—showed up in San Francisco. He called that gambler names that made him draw a gun—first! See the point? The law couldn't touch the kid. The law hasn't been able to touch him since. He took the name Everhard and has he lived up to it!"

"Yeah. I know. He can do anything with cards. Or a gun. You bet!"

"But the nicest part of the story," said Helen, pouring more brandy into another small cup of coffee, "is that after the heirs got through slicing up grandfather's estate and taking the choice spots, they gave Don a patch of desert. Worth about a dollar an acre. Now it's an oil field!"

Mike grinned, pleased. He liked his job and his employer. Mike was about as ugly as a man could be; but, like most wrestlers, outside the ring was as gentle as an old English bulldog.

"Tell me, Mike. Are you Don's bodyguard?"

"Bodyguard to *him*? Hell, no. Me," said Mike with widening grin. "I'm just bodyguard to Pete."

"Pete? Pete who?"

"Pete Everhard."

"Who's he?"

"Oh, a feller."

"You're lying, Mike."

"Not a-tall." He looked as if he were.

"Come through," said Helen. "Let me in on the joke."

Mike laughed, shook his head. "Don't you know about your handsome relations?"

"No, Pete, I don't."

"He's a nice boy, Miss Helen. You bet."

"Pete Everhard, hm? There's no such animal."

Mike rubbed his mouth. His eyes sparkled. "Ask Kang there."

Kang, the imperturbable, shrugged his shoulders. Helen teased and fretted, learned nothing. Decided, "It's just something you've made up!"

MR. THEODORE WILKINS stood up and started to put out his hand as Everhard came in. Everhard was not a handshaker. Wilkins, unembarrassed, covered the gesture by shifting the cane; asked, "Mr. Richmond?"

Everhard stood with hands thrust deep in the pockets of a dressing gown. He was tall, straight, carefully dressed. His eyes were a cold grayish blue, steady, hard, quick. His hands were long and delicate, as sensitive as a musician's. He was one of the few people in the world who could empty a .45 automatic at full speed into a four inch ring at 50 yards; one of the fewer who could stack a poker deck in what looked like ordinary shuffling.

Mr. Wilkins had a smooth, cultivated

voice, much ease and assurance. He needed it under Everhard's impassive scrutiny. Everhard invited him to sit down; Wilkins said, "Thank you," and sat.

Everhard, standing, asked, "How is Borgan?"

"A very, very sick man. I recently became his partner in the Hillside Club. We have just learned that George 'Killer' Lynn has been secretly paroled. Did you know?"

"How long ago?" There was neither denial nor affirmation to Wilkins' question.

"We just learned. It gave Borgan a jolt. He was already sick, you know."

"I mean, how long has Lynn been out?"

"About a week." Mr. Wilkins' dark eyes studied Everhard's face but he was looking at the face of one of the best poker players in the world. "Borgan thought you ought to know. You and he are the men Lynn would give his—ah, soul, if he has one, to—well—kill!" He waited for Everhard to say something. Everhard, composedly, said nothing. "Miss Borgan and I are running the club."

Everhard did not know Borgan had a daughter; did not care.

"She felt that you ought to be—shall I say, warned that Lynn is out?"

Everhard meditated. Wilkins admittedly was half owner in a gambling club, the Hillside, some miles out of Los Angeles. All gambling clubs were crooked. To that extent Wilkins confessed to being a crook. All of his life Everhard had had dealings with crooks; seldom trusted any of them; knew they were wily, sly, undependable, and that the time to watch them closest was when they seemed to be doing a favor. Wilkins had an air of forcefulness and refinement which meant he was cleverer than most.

Wilkins said, "Of course, Lynn knows that Borgan ran you in on him and his friends in that famous poker game in his club back East, and—"

"Lynn knows nothing of the kind."

Wilkins raised his eyebrows.

"He was hiding out and joined up with a couple of high-powered poker players to grab easy money. They used Borgan's Glory Hole. Trimmed rich drunks, wouldn't split with Borgan. I showed up. They saw I had a roll. Got me into a game. When the big show-down came, I didn't hold the cards they had dealt me. I had a hand I had picked out for myself. They pulled guns. You know the answer."

Wilkins smiled, showed white even teeth, a little of the gums. "I believe you had all the luck."

"One went headfirst through a window with a hole in his belly. The other, being popular with the ladies, had a nice funeral, too. Lynn was picked up and carried off to the hospital, where the cops recognized him."

"He said his automatic jammed."

"He's a liar. His courage jammed. He hasn't the guts to shoot it out face to face. He needs a machine gun in the dark—and the victim's back to him. That's the sort of 'killer' he is."

Wilkins drew his breath in sharply through the even white teeth.

"And," Everhard added, "when he shows up and tries to scare you and Borgan into buying him off, tell him I said so."

Mr. Wilkins touched his mustache with a manicured fingertip. "You think he may do that?" he asked. "Try it, I mean?"

"Don't you? Borgan does! Fear of it has already made him sick."

Wilkins thought it over. He had a pretty good poker face of his own.

Doctors had patched Lynn up. He was taken into court, tried for one of many suspected murders. The lawyers, having money, gummed things up. They did not want an acquittal. Lynn would then immediately have been tried for

some other crime. They muddled the jury into a mild verdict of manslaughter. Lynn grinned as he was led away. Now the parole board in the Eastern state had whispered, "Get out of here. You're teaching our boys to be bad."

"Of course," said Everhard, "Rinsko got him out."

Wilkins' jaw dropped a little, a startled look crossed his face. "Rinsko!" Then, half asking, half declaring, "Rinsko is dead."

"If Lynn had stayed in prison, I might have believed it. Rinsko is one kidnaper that snaps his fingers at the G-men. He grabs crooks and gamblers. They simply disappear. When they come back they don't take their troubles to the G-men. He uses Lynn. He uses vacant houses. Nobody knows who he is or what he looks like. You know your own business; Rinsko can find out whether it's worth while to snatch *you.*"

"Why—why *me?*" There was something very like a faint smile on Mr. Wilkin's smooth face.

"Borgan has built up a good business with the Hillside. But he hasn't much of a bank account. Because of Lynn's grudge, Rinsko will be sure to look Borgan over. If he passes him up, you'll be next for inspection. Judge for yourself!"

"Ah," Wilkins' voice was smooth but disclosed irritation at Everhard's not courteous directness, "by that line of reasoning, perhaps you are—shall we say, eligible?"

"Perhaps. And when you go back to the Hillside Club, Wilkins, overhaul your staff. The day Lynn—though it was supposed to be a secret—left prison, I knew it. I phoned Borgan. Gave the message to a man who claimed to be his secretary."

Wilkins looked a little flustered. He stood up, fingered his hat brim. "I only bought into the club two weeks ago." Reassurance came back. "It seems I may have let myself in for—for a little difficulty, hm?" Everhard coolly said nothing. "Well, come out and see us. You are always welcome. Made many changes. Miss Borgan is—ah—a very pretty girl." That seemed to be the thing Wilkins had come to say.

Everhard rang for Kang Ko. The Chinaman showed Mr. Wilkins to the door. Everhard stood motionless for some moments, went into the room where Mike was explaining the technique of "rasslin' " to the amused girl.

Everhard said, "Mike. Get Pete out and dust him off. I think we are going to begin using the old boy again."

Mike laughed, went out of the room, into a closet, came back carrying at arm's length before him a man-sized wax-headed limp-bodied dummy which, in the tonneau of a limousine, could very well pass at night for Everhard himself.

MIKE togged himself out in a tight-fitting olive uniform, with leggings and high-crowned cap. The uniform was not Everhard's idea, but Helen's. She often borrowed the big car and Mike.

He drove the limousine out of the garage about nine o'clock and when he came out of the Hellenic Hall's parkway, a figure in the sort of hat and coat that Everhard wore sat on the rear seat.

Mike moved into the traffic, drove out Wilshire, pulled into the parking lot of a swell club, backed his car into the shadows, pulled a rope and yanked the dummy off the seat. A half hour later Mike drove off, the dummy upright. For three-quarters of an hour Mike drove about this way and that, as if given new orders every few minutes. Then he drove far out to a country club called The Europa. When he entered the parking lot a roadster followed, backed into the shadows.

The driver got out, lighted a cigar, sauntered toward the club, did not go in, but sauntered back. He had on a double-breasted brown suit with a lot of red in it, a red puff necktie set with some-

thing that, in the right light, looked like a diamond. He wore a big seal ring. His shoes were polished as if waxed. He had a belly, fat jaws, pudgy nose.

Everhard noiselessly stepped up behind him, tapped his shoulder, said, "Take it easy!"

The man made a gulping sound, turned with a startled jerk. The light was not good, but good enough to see the look on Everhard's face.

"What's all—what's all this?"

"You know who I am. You have followed every turn my car made for the last hour. Probably thought I was in it. Why?"

The man wet his lips, tried an easy laugh that did not go over well, jerked at his necktie as if to loosen the pressure on his throat.

"Mister, you're mistaken. I ain't been followin' anybody. I—"

Everhard's hand moved. No gun appeared but the man gave a start.

"—Lissen, lissen for God's sake, Mr. Everhard! I'm Brown of the Brown Detective Agency—"

"I know you private detectives. You make peepholes in bedrooms! Who hired you?"

"Hired me?"

"Roll over and sit up. I'm not used to asking the same question twice."

Brown looked pained. "I got my duty to clients, like doctors and—and priests have!" It was not a very good answer as far as the mere words were concerned but the tone gave an inkling of what Brown hoped for.

"All right. Make it convincing and I'll pay you. Come along over here where we can talk." Everhard led the way to the edge of shadows barely beyond reach of the row of lights over the parking lot. He placed Brown so the light was on his face, then asked: "Who hired you?"

"Miss Borgan of the Hillside Club. Her and a feller named Wilkins."

"What do they want to know?"

"Everything I can give 'em. Where you go. Who you meet. All about you."

"How long?"

"'Bout a week."

"You haven't been shadowing me for a week. You began yesterday. That's why I nailed you tonight. So you have been trying to pry into my affairs, get a financial report, and such things. That right?"

Brown wasn't at ease. He said, "Honest, I didn't want the job. Honest!"

"Keep talking."

"Well you see, you—you are hell on gamblers. The way they tell it to me, they're afraid maybe you are laying to —to visit them. See?"

"What can you tell them that would stop me?"

"I don't know about that. I—I was just trying to earn a couple of honest dollars. How they use the info I give 'em—that's up to them. I—I ain't been so hot for the job. Honest."

Brown drew back his coat, showed a badge.

"You have looked me up pretty well?" Everhard asked.

"Well, in a way, I—yes—"

"You have discovered that I usually win out, haven't you?"

"Yeah, that's right."

"Do you want to be on the losing side?"

Brown laughed nervously, shook his head. "No I don't."

"Then climb over to the other side of the fence." Everhard drew a wallet, peeled off bills. "Here. Stay on the job. But if I find out you are not working for me, you'll have regrets the rest of your life. I'm going to the Hillside, now. Have a look at this Miss Borgan, talk to Borgan. Tag me if you want, just to show them how well you are doing your job."

Everhard sent Mike and the car home, walked a half block and got into the heavy, long-hooded coupé in which he had trailed Brown while he trailed Mike.

Brown, as soon as he saw the limousine pull out, hurried into The Europa,

went to the public phone, called a number, dropped in coins.

"Say, listen, Miss Borgan. I got something hot! I just heard Everhard say to a feller that he was comin' straight to the Hillside to have a talk with you! . . . Yeah. I'm tellin' you! He's on his way . . . See how I'm coverin' him? Say— Hello? Hello? Brown looked at the phone reproachfully.

Miss Borgan had hung up.

THE coupé swung up the wide curved road, passed the tall stone pillars with big lights on top, ran into the parking lot, where strings of electric lights gave almost the brightness of day. The lot was well filled with good cars. The Hillside attracted playboys and playgirls from Hollywood.

Before he reached the entrance, stuccoed to imitate a Spanish hacienda, he heard the orchestra. The Hillside served a good dinner, had a good orchestra, a good floor; gave the impression that gambling was merely incidental.

A man in uniform eyed him; asked, "Are you a member, sir?"

"No."

"I am sorry, sir, but only members—"

The door opened. Wilkins himself looked out, said with an air of pleased surprised, "Why, Mr. Richmond! So glad you came."

Everhard said: "I want to see Borgan."

"Borgan? Oh, why, Mr. Borgan took a turn for the worse this afternoon. Was removed to the hospital."

"What hospital?"

"Clare will know. That is Miss Borgan. Come along. I will find her. The poor girl is very upset.

Everhard followed Wilkins along the corridor, open on one side, that skirted the dining room, where gray-headed men with bulbous bellies played with painted girls, some pretty, nearly all young. Waiters moved with noiseless hurry, carrying trays and bottles. A pasty looking crooner, eyes closed, was bleating, *"Oh for a view of you, love . . ."* Crooners irritated Everhard much as a cat's yowling irritates a collie.

They went into the game room. A shaded lamp hung low over a roulette table and a dozen people, some on stools. A woman in a black lace dress with a long cigarette holder, gleefully raked in chips. Everhard paused, saw that she did not drop her chips until the wheel spun, got down the fistful just as the voice droned, "That's all. The wheel spins." She was sucker-bait. Her bets won, encouraged others to plunge; but she made them too late for the others to ride with her. A man was dealing blackjack to a group of four who bet idly, more interested in their own conversation than the game. Dice bounced over a green, side-boarded table. Not much of a game going in craps, but enough to help expenses.

Wilkins went to a cupboard-like box, took out a telephone, spoke in smooth, cultivated tones. "Miss Borgan." Pause. "Miss Borgan? . . . Mr. Richmond is here. Will you see him? We'll be right up."

Wilkins led the way on the stairs to the balcony that overlooked the game room. Two lookouts stood by a balcony post, silent, watchful. If anything got off-key downstairs, if a loser yapped or a drunken man argued, if a drunken girl wanted to do a fan dance without the fan, they would slip down, quietly ease the disturber into a room. They glanced at Everhard. He met their eyes, continued to look at them when they looked aside.

Everhard knew that he was about as welcome in a gambling house as a nigger in a hencoop.

Wilkins murmured affably as he swung open the door of Borgan's private office, stepped back, pointed invitingly.

Everhard looked quickly about the

room. It was an inside room with no windows but a skylight; it would be nearly sound proof. The table was polished teak, the chairs were covered with red leather. No one was there. A door, now closed, was directly across the room.

Wilkins said, "Sit down. Miss Borgan will be in right away."

Everhard said, "Stuffy. I'll wait out here."

Wilkins raised his silken eyebrows. "Ah, as you please."

Everhard stood by a balcony post, did not look down into the game room. Wilkins was pleasant, not at ease, looked about. He noted that Everhard had pushed back his coat, that his thumb seemed to be but was not hooked inside his belt.

Wilkins said he would go see what was keeping her, went off, came back at once with a girl. Really a very pretty girl, except that she was smeared with rouge and such stuff as faded ladies need. She had firm, well-shaped features, steady blue eyes, rounded lips that were firm, not slack. She wore a blue silk dress, some jewelry.

Miss Borgan smiled, put out her hand. "I am so glad to meet you. Won't you come into the office where we can talk."

Everhard glanced at her. "Not a room with skylights. Or one that has loopholes on the inside door. Gives the other fellow too much advantage."

The girl caught her breath. "Why, Mr. Ever—Richmond! How can you think of such a thing!"

He smiled. "I am really quite timid. I jump from shadows, avoid black cats, and never pass under ladders. In fact, I have lots of superstitions. Loopholes are included. Skylights, too."

Wilkins laughed. "Why that is merely a look-through, so—um—Mr. Borgan can see who has called. And the skylight—that instead of windows.

Everhard listened with an air of learning things.

Wilkins excused himself, said he had to get back downstairs, and urged Everhard to feel welcome.

Miss Borgan explained with an almost coaxing air that her father was so very sick ". . . and I am *so* worried over him!"

"What hospital?"

There was a slight flutter in her voice. "Oh, please, but you see I promised him I wouldn't tell any one. I'm sorry—but—Lynn—father is dreadfully upset. He is worried to death. I promised I wouldn't tell a soul. Please, don't you understand?"

"Perfectly," said Everhard.

She smiled. She had a nice smile. He saw, or thought he did, a shadowy tenseness deep in her eyes.

"You look sensible. Why not act it?" He said in a low voice.

"Why, whatever can you mean?"

"Theres' a bad mess of spoiled fish being cooked around here. I can smell it."

Everhard put a finger under her chin, lifted her face. She did not draw back but looked straight into his eyes. He spoke with advisory gentleness. "Borgan is not in a hospital. If he were afraid of Lynn I am the one man he would want near him. As for you, my dear, you'd better find some nice boob, marry him, keep him fooled—and be happy. Happier than you are going to be in this racket." He dropped his hand, smiled. "Understand?"

"Really," she said, "I can't imagine what—"

"Liar," he said pleasantly. "Borgan is trying to sell me out to Lynn. Protect his own hide. Tell him to tell Lynn that practice makes perfect—so next time I hope to do better."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll kill him on sight. Lynn, I mean. I am leaving the back way. I have been here before, you know. Never had the pleasure of meeting you. Always like to meet pretty girls."

He walked quickly along the balcony in the opposite direction from the way he had come, turned down the stairs

that led to the rear, passed through the kitchen, where cook and helpers paused to stare, and out the back way. He got into his car and drove off.

As soon as Everhard left the balcony a couple of tough boys in dress suits came through the inner door of Borgan's office, demanded, "What crimped the set-up?"

Wilkins, who had been watching, came at a trot, patted his forehead with a silk handkerchief. The girl lied, "He doesn't seem to suspect a thing, really. Believes that Borgan is so frightened of George that he had to go to the hospital. I don't know why he went the back way."

The George she named was George "Killer" Lynn.

Wilkins said irritably, not without a certain touch of reluctant admiration: "He sure knows how to make it hard, all right. Not a thing in the world to make him suspicious, yet would he set down in that office? No. If he had I could have flipped the door to, turned the key!"

Wilkins chuckled, looked brightly from face to face. Clare Borgan eyed him from under lowered lids.

Then they all went into the office, on into the inner room. Borgan sat there. He looked like a very sick man. He sat in a comfortable chair but his feet were tied to the legs of the chair. A rope was about his body, knotted in the back. His hands were free, but another tough egg lolled in a chair across from him, toyed with a blackjack. An automatic shotgun stood in a corner.

Borgan was a helpless prisoner—had been a prisoner for two weeks.

BEFORE nine the next morning Everhard called the *Brown Detective Agency*. The girl said Brown hadn't come in. Everhard left the Hellenic number, said, "Ask for 821."

An hour later Brown phoned, found he was talking to Everhard, said: "Oh, hello. How'd things come out?"

"You didn't tail me."

"No. I let it go, because—"

"Because you phoned that I was on my way."

"I phoned?" Brown tried to sound as amazed and indignant as if he had never thought of such a thing.

"Get down to earth. If you are not working for me, get up here quick with that money I gave you. I pay well. And I want service. What'd you say?"

"Say—aw, now listen. You said yourself you wanted me to get myself in good with them. That little tip, see, it was just the thing to—you understand?"

"You are not dealing with a divorce case, Brown. You may not know it, but you are handling dynamite—and you don't know how. So you had better learn something. You and your kind get by double-crossing men and their wives, playing one against the other. Don't try that now. I'll give you the best advice I know. If you are smart, take the first boat to Honolulu. Smarter to go clear to Shanghai."

"Say, I guess I know a little something about how to run—"

Everhard hung up, turned to his breakfast.

Mike came in, critically watched Everhard break off small pieces of buttered toast.

"Call that a breakfast? You'd have to add a couple o' fat worms to make it big enough for a sparrer."

"Call up the Brown Agency. If Brown's in, hang up. If not, ask when he will be back."

Mike phoned, waited, hung up.

"Try again every once in a while. Let me know when Brown is out. Helen want you to drive her today?"

"Nope. She's running up to La Canada s'afternoon to visit that sick aunt. Ain't you going to tell me what happened last night?"

"Nothing happened. Only you snored louder than usual."

"Aw, I mean up to that Hillside Club."

"My guess is that you will probably get ripped to pieces by a machine-gun one of these nights driving my car. How does that sound?"

Mike said, "Huh. It's all in the cards. If your name ain't up, they can use Big Bertha and it won't do a thing except maybe hurt your ear drums. If your number's on the board—a flea can bite you and out you go! That's all there is to that. What's goin' happen is goin' happen; and what ain't can't be made to. See?"

He rammed his hands deep in his trouser pocket, nodded. He liked working for Everhard: lots to eat, good pay, swell place to live—and about all he had to do was go out now and then and get shot at. So far he had been missed. It was a snap compared to having tanglebums butt you in the belly, sock your nose with an elbow, jump knees-down on you.

"It may be that I'm getting jumpy, Mike. Seeing things in the dark. As you know, Killer Lynn's out of prison. Paroled. That took pressure. It's known, can't be proved, that he works for Rinsko. Rinsko's a snatcher. One the G-men can't touch, largely because they don't know whom to look for. He makes a business of grabbing big-time crooks and gamblers. They pay or they don't come back. When they do come back they don't squawk. Something tells me I may be in line."

"The guy that grabs you had better wear armor plate," said Mike.

"When Wilkins showed up, trying to be nice, I wondered why. When I nailed Brown last night, I guessed they had tied a shadow to me whose mug wouldn't make a policeman jump for him. If any imported gangsters tried to follow me, they might get picked up. My guess is that Borgan, and Wilkins too, are trying to buy themselves off from Lynn's grudge by helping him get his hands on me. I'll be handed over to Rinsko for a squeeze. After that, just to please Lynn,

I'll be soaked in concrete, dumped into the harbor. That's my guess. Hope I'm wrong. But if I am wrong, Lynn is going to sneak up some night and start shooting. He can't forget that everybody knows he was trying to get out of the room at the Glory Hole when I shot him. Says his automatic jammed. What would you do, Mike, if your automatic jammed in a pointblank fight?"

"I'd use it for a club. Wouldn't you?"

"My automatics never jam."

Everhard went into another room, read the papers, looked over some magazines.

About an hour later Mike came in, told him Brown was out, wouldn't be back till afternoon; then asked, "Want the car?"

"Taxi will do."

ABOUT 11:30 Everhard entered a musty, half vacant old building not far from the City Hall. The old elevator with an old pilot crept up to the fourth and top floor, came to a sluggish stop.

Everhard stepped out, walked down the hall. He opened a door lettered, *Brown Detective Agency*, entered a narrow waiting room. There was one win-

dow. It opened on a view of lower roofs with black asphalt tops and dirty tent-like skylights.

A bare-headed girl was by the window before a small desk. She lolled back, smoking a cigarette. She had her skirts hiked up. Her lashes were beaded, eyebrows penciled, waist lacy. Her legs were as most men think a girl's legs ought to be and she didn't want anybody to think maybe she didn't have them. The basic use of legs is, of course, to get you places; and she was willing to try.

She took the cigarette from her red-rimmed mouth, clipped it under a forefinger, stared coolly. Everhard looked like somebody. Her voice was pleasant. "Something I can do for you?"

"Mr. Brown in?"

"No he a—isn't." She smiled. "Anything I can do?"

Everhard looked at her steadily, moved closer. Under his look her expression changed to puzzlement, a little doubtful. She knew that something was coming, but men usually smiled when they came closer. They often came closer. Part of her job seemed not to be too discouraging.

Without a word he dipped finger and thumb into a lower vest pocket. His hand hung there as if not yet quite sure, then he reached out his hand, offering something.

She saw neatly folded green paper, knew it was money. Her glance fluttered from his hand to his unsmiling face. It was his not smiling that made her wonder with just a trace of uneasiness. "Why on earth?"

"Take it and I'll tell you."

She took it slowly, laid it in her other palm, looked down, looked up astonished; fingered the money, saw more than one bill, was more astonished. There were five crisp twenty dollar bills. She fluttered her eyelids, smiled:

"I don't know what you think you are buying, but—hell! What do I do?"

"I am Don Everhard."

Her eyes flashed wide, a sudden rigid stiffness tightened her body. "Oh." It was a whisper. Some sort of fear hit her hard.

He said as quietly as if talking of the weather. "A certain party has paid Brown to watch me. I am paying Brown to double-cross that party. But I do not trust Brown. I want the inside track. You can give it to me. If you don't want to do it, say so. How about it?"

She seemed upset, mumbled in an absent sort of way, "So that's it." Then, with eyes lowered, "You are right. He is double-crossing you." She turned, looked out of the window and her toe tapped as if nervously trying to send a code to herself. She asked, not looking around, "But how do you know that you'll get what you pay for? Maybe I'll—you know. It has been done."

"Suit yourself, sister. Sell me out if you like. It's been tried, lots of times."

She hesitated in a troubled mood, then turned quickly, came close. Her face was tense, voice excited:

"You'll get it! Everything I can give you. Listen. These other people—I don't know who the hell they are—that hired him to watch you, don't trust him either. A man came up here to see me last week. Name of Packy. Gave me ten dollars just to let him know if—if you—if Brown made a deal with you."

"And this morning," said Everhard gently, "you told Packy what I said to Brown over the phone?"

The girl's lips tightened. She was afraid. She almost tried lying, then, with a hurried blurt, "Sure I did. And Packy is coming to see him between one-thirty and two. I don't know what's up, but I've been told to take the afternoon off. That means something. They don't want me around." She crackled the new bills in her fist. "But listen. This is money! Packy gave me ten dollars. Talked about taking me out to a show if I was a good girl. To hell with that!" She held up the

fist with the ends of crisp bills sticking out. "This is something! And another thing." A look of angered spite gleamed in her eyes. "I'm working for Brown. I've got to work. But he's a double-crossing, blackmailing rat! I hate the ground he walks on, damn his soul!"

"Thanks. I'm glad to know. And this Packy person. How do you communicate with him?"

"It's that joint called the Half Circle. He didn't say so. Just give me a number that I was to call and leave word for him. When I called, they said it was the Half Circle. That's on the square."

"Good. I'll have somebody go out and take a look at the Half Circle. I'll not mention your name to anybody. And you are not to mention mine. Bargain?"

"Sure. You bet. Say, I've heard of you. And you sure look it." She spoke with brazen eagerness.

"Your name?"

"Madge Banks."

"I'll remember."

They went out together. The waiting room door was not locked. Any one could come in, sit down, wait.

Everhard went down with her in the elevator, walked with her for a block. She encouragingly showed that she liked him, reassured him, "Count on me. I'll give you every thing I can. And keep mum."

"That will be fine. I must go this way. We'll meet again."

"Make it soon," said Madge, giving him her nicest smile.

Everhard walked around the block, went back to the old building, watched until the elevator was called, slipped inside, climbed the stairs.

He went into Brown's waiting room; having noted that she did not lock the drawer of her desk, he opened it, took out the key, unlocked the private office. He wiped the key with a handkerchief,

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used the handkerchief in turning the knob of Brown's private office.

CHAPTER II

THE BIG BOY

TWO doors opened from the private office; one from the waiting room, the other into a narrow hall by which Brown's clients could leave without going back through the waiting room.

The office was a rather large room from which a narrow strip had been sliced by a partition to make the waiting room. There was not much furniture. An old flat-topped desk was placed so that Brown, in his large swivel chair, would have his back to the north windows; clients, sitting across from him, would face the light. A tall metal filing case of heavy metal that had a rusted look stood against the wall. On the floor was a worn rug that covered only the center of the room.

In a corner was a small closet with hooks and shelves. The shelves were piled with one thing and another, pitched there to be out of the way. An old rubber coat was on a hook. It had probably been hanging there since the last rain and looked like the badly dried skin of some large animal.

Everhard looked about, kept his fingers off things, waited patiently.

When he heard the outside door slam he stepped into the closet, drew the door too, not quite closing it, leaving just a thread of light to peer through.

Brown came in. There was a jangle of keys in his hand; he grumbled oaths, as if irritated that the girl had neglected to lock his private office. He left the door into his office wide open, went toward his desk, tossed his hat at the top of the book case, flopped down in the swivel chair, swung back. The chair creaked. He took a cigar, put his feet on the table, folded his hands on his stomach. The unlighted cigar was screwed over in one side of his mouth. He had had some drinks, a big lunch, was sleepy. His jaws sagged, relaxed.

Everhard, in the closet, stood motionless. Rumbling street cars clanged by. Now and then petulant drivers made horns squawk.

Somebody quietly entered the waiting room, came toward the office. The footsteps were light and slow. To Everhard, listening alertly, they sounded cautious. Everhard could not see in any direction except across the flat desk where Brown dozed.

A voice said roughly, "You, Brown!"

Brown's eyes popped open, blinked. He took the cigar from his mouth, dropped his feet to the floor. "Just having a little cat nap. Been up for a week on the case. Say, I'm sure givin' what's wanted, ain't I?"

"You double-crossin' fatheaded . . . " The man laid his tongue to some choice names. ". . . I've come to give it to you, and now!"

Brown's chair squeaked. Fear expanded on his face. He raised both palms elbow-high in submissive fright, talked fast.

"Here!" he blurted in glib amazement, with desperate effort to be soothing. "You've got me wrong as hell, feller! I'm —say, listen—what's the matter with you? We've got that feller right where we want him!"

"I've got you where I want you. And you're goin' get it, right in the guts! You sold us out and—"

Brown laughed. It was a pretty good laugh for a man as scared as he was. He hadn't squirmed through the world for so many years, playing people one against the other, without acquiring a certain assurance and deceptive glibness. "Don't be a sap!"

"You're on the way to the morgue, rat!"

Everhard thought Brown's chances of wriggling out of this were pretty good.

The gunman Packy was talking too much.

Brown said, "Wise up, feller. I never went near Everhard till he sent for me!"

"Sent for you?"

"That's what I said! Say, that guy's not hard. He's yellow and soft. Scared, too! I'm the best private detective in Los Angeles. He sent for *me*. He said things were breakin' in a way he couldn't figure. That's why he sent for me. Get this. Here we are, tryin' to work up close to him, and he sends for me. I was goin' out this afternoon to give Miss Borgan—say, ain't she a pretty girl!"

"Wilk thinks so. And so does a tougher guy than Wilkins," Packy admitted.

"If it gives you any fun, keep right on holding that gun. But what say, you and me now go right out to the Hillside Club and tell 'em? How about it?"

"You're stallin', Brown."

"Honest to God, I'm tellin' you just how it is."

"My orders was to dish it out to you. 'F I don't, I'll get it myself."

"But I'm tellin' you! Look! What a break! We're tailin' this so-called hard guy, see? The hard guy gets cold feet—gets jittery as hell, and calls me in to prowl for 'im! Can you beat it? Come on. Let's go out there an' talk it over. Hell, then if you wanta shoot, why sure—how 'm I goin' stop you? Use your head!"

Brown got up, walked toward the book case, reached for his hat.

The closet door opened noiselessly. Everhard stood there. Brown, facing that way, saw him at once, gulped.

The man called Packy was right by Brown's side and spun about, gun in hand. He snarled "You double-crossin' son—" and let Brown have it point blank in the head, then Packy ducked down behind a corner of the desk, shot again.

The two automatics made one report. A bullet smashed into the jam of the closet door above Everhard's head. Packy straightened up, seemed to leap as if awkwardly lunging forward with head thrown back. He went limp at the knees and his arms wavered out as if made of soft rubber. The gun dropped. He fell face down.

Brown, the back of his head blown out, lay within an arm's reach of Packy's feet.

Everhard stood with head slightly cocked, listening for sounds of alarmed voices, hurrying feet. There were none. The jar of traffic and clang of cars in the streets below may have made whoever heard the room-muffled report think the sound was merely a truck's backfire.

Everhard stooped, took hold of Packy's hair, turned his head to have a look at his face; stared for a long moment, not recognizing it as a face he knew.

He bent low, peered at Brown. The face was scorched with powder-burn, point-blank. The bullet had gone through his head, splattered on the metal filing case. Packy, true to gangster vengeance, shot the double-crosser first.

Everhard slowly looked about the room, went up and studied the place where the bullet from Packy's .45 automatic had smashed into the wood. The metal jacketed slug had struck hard, gone deep, and not much of a hole showed in the pine. He crossed to the desk, took the brush from the paste pot, wiped it almost dry, painted a mere film over the broken wood where the bullet had entered. He returned the brush to the pot, wiped the handle. He took up dust from his handkerchief under the swivel chair where Brown's feet had scuffed the floor, and with the dust discolored the spot where the bullet struck. Only a close and suspicious examination would disclose the mark; only a definite examination would reveal that it was freshly made.

He looked about the floor, found the empty shell where it had been kicked by his automatic; dropped the shell into

his pocket. If only two empty shells were found, only two bullets traced, it would have to appear that both men had been killed with one gun. Brown's face was as powder-marked as if he had shot himself.

Everhard took up Packy's gun, left whatever fingerprints might be on it undisturbed, pressed Brown's hand about the handle; but instead of putting Brown's forefinger about the trigger, he put Brown's thumb on the trigger.

The astonishing and perplexing inference would have to be that Brown, somehow, had got hold of Packy's gun, shot him, then shot himself. That would be hard to believe; but, unless the concealed bullet in the woodwork was found, harder not to believe.

Everhard was not primarily concerned in fooling the police, except in so far as he would be more comfortable if they did not set about looking for a third party. What he wanted was to mystify and jolt the Borgan outfit, let them wonder and worry.

He wiped the knobs of the closet door, pushed the closet door to with his elbow, used his handkerchief to open the hall door. No one was about.

With a certain amount of caution he made his way down stairs, pausing once to untie and retie a shoestring when it seemed best to stoop on the stairs, not be seen.

He left the building when the elevator was up and no one was in the entrance, walked two blocks, got a taxi near the postoffice.

"The Half Circle Club!"

NIGHT clubs in daylight are dreary dumps. The Half Circle was a sprawling one-story shack; not at all swell. It didn't get going good until along toward midnight, then had to put on a show that made it worth while for parties to break away from other hot spots and give it a whirl.

It was about three-thirty when Everhard paid off the taxi, pushed his way in through the front door, stopped short. Coming from sunlight into dimness made him blink for a moment. If somebody happened to know him by sight the noise might start right away.

It was a messy looking dump, with chairs still on some tables and fresh sawdust scattered about. Tissue paper and tinsel were strung about overhead and grotesque silhouettes were pasted over the numerous cheap mirrors. When colored lights were on, an orchestra banged, customers were half drunk, and girls pranced with a little of nothing on, and soon took some of that off, it seemed a good show to some people.

Now a couple of men at a large round table were having drinks with some of the night girls. In their street clothes they looked a hard, frowzy lot, eyed him with instinctive distrust. He wasn't the type.

Everhard stared at one man, looked hard at the other. "Who's in charge?"

"Me," said a fellow with a red, pimply face, sullenly. "Anything eatin' you?"

"I'll ask the questions. Where's Packy? I want him and I want him quick."

Every eye there stared at Everhard with scowling wonderment, some uneasiness. He seemed to know what he wanted, seemed to have authority; but nobody knew him. A girl with a red feather in her hat, red fingernails, red mouth, thin, cold features, said, "You a dick?"

He flipped open his coat, showing he did not have a badge, showing as if accidentally the shoulder holster—another gun was on his right hip—snapped, "Do I look like a cop?"

There was the soft sound of relaxed breathing.

"Packy? Packy?" said the man with the pimply face, inquiringly glancing from face to face. "Any of you know the guy?"

"Not me," said the other man, scratching at a spot on the table, eyeing the spot with interest.

The girl with the red feather said nothing, stared.

Pimply Face looked up, smirking. "You got off at the wrong place."

Everhard slapped him across the mouth with a quick back-handed blow; "Don't talk so much and tell more!"

The other man was younger, slimmer, neater, wore a blue shirt with a turned down collar, fresh and stiffly starched. He overturned his chair, made a grab toward his hip and was looking into a .45 before he could even get his gun out from under his coat tail. His face turned white and he submissively put his hands palm-out before his shoulders. The girls squeaked and bounced on their chairs, dodging; all excepting the girl with the red feather. She eyed Everhard with a look of dawning surmise. Pimply Face hit the back of his chair, raised his hands, stared, eyed.

There were some moments of silence; then the girl with the red feather said, "Use your eyes, saps! This man's big time. Mister, I know Packy. So what?"

"Plenty." Everhard walked around the table, flipped up the coat of the man in the blue shirt, took out the automatic. He threw the shell, locked the slide open, picked up a handful of sawdust, rubbed it into the open gun, released the slide. The gun was useless until taken apart, cleaned. He tossed it on to the table. "Play with a dummy from now on. Just your size, punk."

The man in the blue shirt looked as if he wanted to cry, he was that mad and humiliated before the girls.

He said to Pimply Face, "Give her the key to your car. I came in a taxi. Sent it off. I thought I was coming to where Packy had friends. You'll learn."

The girl in the red hat looked up sharply, hesitated, then put out her hand. "Come across, Muggler."

A girl squeaked at her, "But you don't know this guy!"

"Ho, don't I? Any time I don't know the real thing when it wears pants, I'll join the Salvation Army!"

Muggler took out a key ring, fumbled. His glances sidled this way and that, came to rest on the jammed automatic. He slipped off the key and the girl snatched it.

"I'm ready," she said.

Everhard said, "Keep your seats after we go out. Better sit right there till you see the evening papers."

He followed the girl out. She went briskly, and with no nervousness got in the car, started it, turned onto the boulevard, then: "Now what? What's that crack about the evening papers?"

"Are you dressed for traveling?"

"Depends. Where to?"

"Far away. By plane. Get out of this town and stay out, just as soon as you can tell me who put Packy on the spot."

The car almost skidded into the curb. She gripped the wheel with both hands, caught her breath. "What?"

"We'll drive around till the extras come out. Then you'll see. I crashed in, asked for Packy just as a line to see who would come through. Knew that only somebody who was his good friend would loosen up. You did. So I'll see that you get in the clear—just as soon as you tell me the names of the fellows who could have put him on the spot. And where I can find them?"

"Packy! No, it can't be? You m-mean he's—he's dead?"

"That's right."

The girl bit her lips, took a couple of jerky breaths. "Who are you?"

"I am not telling any more than this: Give me the names of these pals of Packy's who you think would have put him on the spot; then you go off somewhere and watch the papers. You'll find that one by one something happens to them!"

She said, "God, I don't know. I'm not

trying to hold out on you. I just don't know. I come West with him about two weeks ago. He put me in there at the Half Circle. It's a lousy dump. He hung around there waiting for phone calls." She swung her head, looking at him, asked, "Do you know that woman they brought out here—Clare, they call her?"

"Yes. I know her. What about her?"

"Well, Packy didn't trust her."

"Is that the way he felt about it, or just the way he told it to you?"

"That's how he felt. You ain't going to get sore?"

"Sore? Why?" Miss Borgan's name was "Clare".

"'Cause maybe she's a friend of yours?"

"Not of mine!"

The girl said fiercely, "And I don't trust that George Lynn either!"

"You mean the Killer?" Everhard sounded encouraging.

"Yes, I mean the Killer! Packy said he'd lost his nerve. Said he was all jittery. Say, what did they do to Packy?"

"Sent him up to talk to a private detective, name of Brown. Somebody was planted there. Both wiped out!"

"You know who done it?"

Everhard said, "Yes. I know who did it. What I want to know is who planned it. Who was in on the deal? Where do you think we could find Lynn about this time of day?"

She swore. "Packy never told me his business. He was one of the bunch that followed Lynn out here on something big. Lynn and that Clare girl. If Packy was framed for the flowers, they know why. Packy hasn't been feeling good the last couple of days. He said things weren't going so good."

"Maybe," Everhard suggested, "he had a hunch. I'd like to talk to Lynn."

She swung into the curb, stopped, took her hands from the wheel, put one on his arm. "Listen. If I tell you, will you take me?"

"Take you where?"

"To where Lynn is? If he framed Packy I want to see him get it!"

"There won't be much talk. The instant he sees me, he'll know why I have come. Yes, I'll take you."

"Listen. Nobody knows I know, but I've got ears, see? I ain't sure, but the man I think is Lynn is in an apartment house called the Tremaine. Room 229. He's layin' low. He don't come out. He's supposed to be crippled and sick, see? That's so nobody'll think it funny he stays in, see?"

"His kind don't stay in. Not with work to do."

"I heard Packy talking over the phone one night. He didn't know anybody was around. He wrote something down on the wall. Too smart to have it in a note book. Lots of numbers and names on the wall. But I know his writing. I learned the number. Tremaine. Room 229."

"On your way," said Everhard.

WHEN he got out at a drug store to look up the Tremaine's address in a phone book, a delivery auto dumped a fresh batch of papers on the sidewalk, and the man yelled at the two kids, "Get 'em goin'! Big extra!"

The kids cut the cord, grabbed papers, looked at the headlines, scanned the double-leaded opening, started shouting: "Extry, Extry! Double-killin' mystery! Extry!"

Everhard bought a copy, took it to the girl, said, "Move over. I'll drive. Look at this."

As he drove she read, mumbling the words; then she crushed the paper, asked:

"But this says that guy Brown got hold of Packy's gun, shot him, then shot himself, so how could it be a frame?"

"Use your head. Packy would let a sucker get his gun, wouldn't he? That Brown was a sucker. Packy was sent to

brush him off. He did. Then somebody killed Packy, walked out. Left a mystery. Cops never learn anything except what crooks tell them."

"Ain't that the truth!" She looked at the paper, dropped it. "You think Lynn made the play?"

"We'll go ask him. No harm in asking him, is there? If he's there, we can show him the paper. See how he acts."

"Sav, it won't do no good to ask, but who are you?"

"What difference does it make?"

"When you smacked Muggler, I knew you were away up. Only one man I can think of would make the play like you made it!"

"Who?"

"The Big One, himself! If I guess will you tell me?"

"Guess and see?"

"You ain't Rinsko, are you?"

"Who's he?"

"Somebody."

"Well, I'm somebody, all right."

"I'll bet you are him!" The idea gave her a thrill.

Everhard shrugged a shoulder, did not contradict her guess. "What do you know of him?"

"Not a thing more than the others know! Packy said there wasn't more than two or three people in the world could identify him. That's so, ain't it?"

"So I've heard. But don't you think if I were Rinsko, I would know things without having to go around and ask people at the Half Circle?"

She thought it over, hesitantly said, "Y-yes. I ought've thought of that."

"Think again, too. Rinsko can be as badly fooled as other people. Have to go out and learn things for himself."

She said, "Oh," convinced.

The Tremaine was a big new looking apartment house, the sort where the middle-class move in an effort to make-believe they are going up in the world. It was flanked on both sides with other apartment houses, none so tall. Everhard looked it over, said:

"On the second floor. Either front or back. The front doesn't offer a chance for any kind of a getaway. So he'll have a room at the back. We'll take a drive around the block."

He drove only half way around the block, turned into an alley, came by the rear of the Tremaine.

"One story up. There's a fire escape. He's probably got a rope and hook for the window ledge in his room. He can

sneak out, sneak in, and if crowded make a getaway. That's a guess. Maybe some good honest war veteran lives there. Got battered saving the world for democracy. Two-twenty-nine, you say? Sure?"

"Sure I'm sure."

"Don't make a mistake."

"No mistake about that."

"Now put one of those pretty ears up close and listen carefully. In this game," he said good humoredly, "those of us live longest who take advantage of the other fellow's set-up. You park the car right here behind the Tremaine. Keep the motor going. If things go the way we want, I'll come down that fire escape. If they don't—well, wait twenty minutes and get going! If you hear any noise up there, sit tight. Don't go off and leave me."

"Me? Say, I stick!"

Everhard left her, walked into the Tremaine. No one was about. He rang a little bell and a faded looking man in a neat black suit, fresh white vest, came out. He was partly gray, had a blanched skin, looked like a decayed gentleman, was polite.

Everhard said at once in a hurried careless way, "I'm Dr. Denham. Dr. Freemantle asked me to call on—no good at names. Never was. I've got the card—" He felt about his pockets, drew out some cards, talked as he sorted them. "Two-twenty-nine. Can remember numbers. Not names. Very sick. Depressed."

The elderly man smiled. "Mr. Cadal, sir?"

"That's it. Of course. Cadal. Yes. He's in?"

"Yes, Doctor. He is confined to a wheel chair and—"

"Yes, yes. Of course. Many visitors?"

"No, Doctor. Just the nurse who takes care of him."

"Nurse?"

"A male nurse."

"The nurse in now?"

"Yes, I—I think so."

"Very sad case," said Everhard. "Suspected of being a little—you know?" Everhard tapped his forehead.

The elderly gentleman put his hands together, looked sad, shook his head.

"Cadal. Cadal. I'll remember. Frightfully embarrassing things, names. People ought to have numbers instead. That right?"

The elderly clerk smiled, graciously agreed.

EVERHARD went up the stairs, found the hall dim, even if lighted by a couple of globes. He scanned the door numbers, found he had guessed right: two-twenty-nine was at the end of the hall.

Everhard put an ear to the door, listened, heard nothing.

He backed away, part way down the hall, turned and ran, made a little clatter on the stairs coming down, rushed to the office desk, thrust out his hand.

"Quick, man! Quick! The key—pass key! I just heard a shot in that room and there's no answer to my knocking! Quick—quick!"

The old man gasped. "How dreadful! Oh—here—here—" He opened a box-like drawer, gave Everhard a key that was fastened to a long plate of brass. "Shall I—police—oh, I hope—"

Everhard left on the run and the old man, after some indecision, started to follow. Everhard ran noiselessly down the hall, paused with a moment's carefulness to thrust the key into the lock—it was a good solid lock—without a click, turned the knob, hit the door with his shoulder, threw it open.

No one was in sight, but a voice called, "What the hell?" Everhard said nothing. He reached behind him, pulled the key from the lock, dropped it, kicked the door to. The voice said, "Say, what's comin' off—" Pause. "Who's there? Hey? *Who's there!*"

The silence was beginning to get on the fellow. Everhard waited, gun in hand. At a glance he had seen the empty wheel chair, saw the scattered magazines, saw the bottles on the sideboard, the cards on the table. In the tense stillness he could hear the hum of the electric clock. It was five of five.

The old clerk was tapping on the door, calling breathlessly, "Doctor! Doctor!"

Everhard had his eyes on the doorway of the inner room. He saw the compensator of a sub-machine gun appear and the next moment a face cautiously moved into view with eyes fearfully nervous, wide, bright. The man said, "Ow!" Instantly there was a rippling burst of fire and plaster on the wall to the left of Everhard flew off the wall, showered off. Everhard shot twice. The heavy gun fell with jarring clatter and the man sprawled forward in the doorway, shot through the head.

The babble in the hall grew louder. The old clerk was calling "Doctor! Doctor!" as if he knew no other words. Other fists were pounding on the door.

Everhard stepped forward, stooped. He already knew it was not Lynn. Lynn, as the crippled Capal, was not, of course, confining himself to any apartment room when there were things to plan, work to do; but being a wheelchair-cripple with a nurse made a nice hideout.

Everhard said, "Using these things takes practice!" He put his automatic within an inch of the sub-machine's trigger, covered his eyes with a forearm, for at such close range there could be a blacklash of lead splinters; shot. The sub-machine would not be used again for a long time. It was not easy to get parts, hard to find a gunsmith that would monkey with outlawed weapons.

The last shot silenced for a mystified moment the clamor in the hall; then it began again with confused voices saying, "police," "break in the door," "murder!" Many voices rose to excited screams.

Everhard was sure there was a rope somewhere for sliding out of the window, but with no time to look, he threw the covers off a bed, pulled a sheet, tied an end to the steam radiator below the window, raised the window, kicked up the screen, looked down.

The girl in the red hat sat in the car, with neck stretched out, face upturned.

"Coming!" he called quietly, scrambled backward through the window, let himself down to the end of the sheet, dropped. He fell off balance to his knees, arose, dusted his knees, looked up and down the alley. There was an instant clamor and pointing from the window by the fire escape overhead.

"I'll drive," he said and ran around the car, got in, started off, not fast. He stopped at the end of the alley, letting a car go by, turned.

"Did you get him?" Her tone indicated that she had no doubt.

"Not Lynn. He wasn't there."

"When I heard that typewriter going I thought—" She caught her breath, laughed a little. "Who are you?"

"The same fellow I was before."

Everhard made for the stream of evening traffic, mingled with it, not passing cars. He said, "Take off your hat. Rip that red feather off. It's the one thing everybody will mention, describing you."

She took off the hat, pulled off the feather, plucked at the raveled threads.

"Throw the feather in back. When the police find the car they'll trace it to our friend Muggler. Let him explain."

"What do we do next?" she asked. The girl sounded excited, not worried; seemed to like the thrill.

"Do you want to be smart?"

"Sure!"

"All right. We get out here." He pulled to the curb near Eighth and Flower. He carefully wiped the wheel with a handkerchief, explaining, "Cops are smart people!"

They walked a block, hailed a taxi,

went to the Interurban Station, where the evening crowd flowed thick and fast. He left her in the waiting room, went down the street, into a pawn shop, bought a good looking traveling bag, came back to the station, used a telephone.

"I thought maybe you'd ditched me," she admitted in an apologetic voice.

"We'll put in enough magazines to give this bag some weight. Your name is Fern Fowler. Your father is dying and you have to get to New York. I have just made reservations on a Trans-Continental Flier. You can pick up everything at the Airport. Leaves at eight o'clock. Don't forget your name!"

"Fern Fowler. Nice name. I think I'll keep it—to remember you by!"

"Here's plenty of money. Hide out and take it easy. If you want to, watch the personal ads. When you see one addressed to Fern Fowler, you'll understand." Then he gave her his best warning with look and tone: "Stay away from anybody that has ever known you, because you are going to get all the blame. That clear?"

She said, "Yes" and seemed a little uneasy, but patted the money she had stuck down inside her waist, took a deep breath. "Some day, maybe, hm?"

He took her out to a taxi, tucked her inside, shook hands; then smiled as she threw him a kiss as the taxi started. He never saw her again, never heard of her; so probably all of her life she thought she had aided the "Big Boy" in the crook game.

CHAPTER III

PAY-OFF ROAD

EVERHARD went to his apartment. Mike was sprawled out, reading the paper. Mike rustled it, said:

"The world's gettin' screwier and screwier! Here's a hard-boiled hood lets a dick take his gun away from him, kill him. Then the dick blows his brains out. Paper says this guy Brown had been on thin ice so long it got his nerve. He just took an out. 'Magine, shootin' yourself to keep somebody else from doin' it!"

Everhard went into his room, opened a drawer, took out a bristle brush, short brass ramrod, bottle of solvent, pieces of muslin. He drew the automatic, removed the clip, threw the shell from its chamber, cleaned the gun. Automatics, being nearly flat, were easy to carry; good guns to use—when they worked. He cleaned his guns himself, and they did not jam.

After dinner Mike asked if it would be all right for him to go to a movie. Everhard said, "Not this time. You'll come home grumbling. You always do."

Mike said, "Suits me fine. I'll just catch up on some sleep." He took off his shoes, lay down on the divan.

When he started to snore, Everhard threw a book at him, told him to go to the movie.

Mike came back a little before twelve, peevish and grumbling. It had been a sad picture. He couldn't see why they made sad pictures when all they had to do was throw a couple of pies and have a comedy that anybody could enjoy. Artistic efforts gave Mike a pain. It was the bunk. He went into the kitchen, spread a midnight lunch for himself, told Kang Ko what was wrong with art.

The phone rang. Everhard said, "Hello?"

A woman's voice said, "Don, Don dear, th-this is Helen and—and—"

"What's happened?" There was the wrong sort of nervous note in Helen Richmond's voice.

"I—I've just had—had an accident out here — Verdugo Bridge, coming home. Car is all smashed and my leg—leg—" Helen's voice rose to a rapid scream: "Don't go! It's you they want! Gun to my head now—but don't go!"

A man's curse; the sound of a blow; a moment's confused scuffling and a loud voice. "Kill the damned—" Then a click, and Everhard was cut off.

"Mike! Get that car around front!"

Mike came on the run, mouth crammed with food.

"Get going! Tell you later. It's Helen."

Swearing, Mike grabbed a cap, went with a burly rush that looked clumsy but wasn't; he was quick and powerful, a fast, tricky man in the ring.

Everhard jiggled the phone. Helen's "accident out here" seemed to imply that the call might have come from outside the city exchange. He told the Hellenic's switchboard girl to put him through to the supervisor.

Everhard spoke slowly, making the words clear: "A call just now came to the Hellenic Hall. I think it came from outside Los Angeles. Some close-by town. If possible, I must know and at once. A girl is held prisoner there."

The supervisor said, "One moment please;" and after a time, in an unhurried, precise voice said, "A call just came from 627 Leaf Avenue, Burbank. There aren't many calls at this hour. That may have been yours."

"Thanks. I'll play that to win!"

He took up the phone book, flipped the pages, put in a call for the Burbank Fire Department, got it quickly and asked for the location of the 600 block on Leaf Avenue; said, "an emergency."

The fireman on duty did not say, "This ain't an information bureau." He said, "Just a minute till I look it up." Then, "Say, that's away out in the sticks, over north and a little east of where Victory and San Fernando comes together. Up toward the hills. Only house around there is in that block. Started a subdivision out there some years ago that fell through."

Everhard opened a drawer, picked up a long flashlight, dropped some loaded clips into his pockets, took two automatics, hurried out to the elevator.

The limousine was at the front door of the Hellenic. He got into the front seat. "Make for Victory Boulevard. And make it fast."

The car started. "What's happened to Miss Helen?"

"Gangsters grabbed her for a decoy. Had her phone in to drag me out to some spot. A gun at her head, but she wouldn't go through with it."

Mike swore in a muffled, thick-voiced way, made the car jump from forty miles to fifty.

"They may be smart enough to know the call can be traced," Everhard said, "—but I doubt it. They weren't smart enough to sock her quick when she showed their hand. If I couldn't have traced the call I would have made for Verdugo Bridge. But of course they'll be tipped off that she squawked. One thing makes me hope for the best. They turned her over to boobs, and—"

"She's got the family nerve," said Mike.

"Family nerve, nothing! She's got it all. Nobody else in the family would talk like that with a gun at their head. Get some speed out of this bus. You coaxed me to buy it. Eight thousand dollars for what—the varnish job?"

They roared down Los Feliz. Mike banked the heavy car like a racer on the left turn at Griffith Park and the tires squealed.

"Their game would have been perfect if Helen had played it out. We'd have gone to Verdugo Bridge, walked right into the trap. A gun at her head, Mike."

"You think they killed her?"

"Yes."

Mike made hurt sounds between clenched teeth, leaned to the wheel, roared over the empty Boulevard.

When they reached the intersection the fireman had spoken of, Mike swung across the railroad toward the north and in a few blocks came to the end of the pavement. There was no moon and

toward the hills the ground seemed covered with chaparral-like growth.

Nearby was a small shack of a house. Everhard went to it, knocked hard. A man called, "Hey, what do you want?"

"Where is Leaf Avenue?"

"First turn to the right, second to the left. Only house up there. I didn't know folks was movin' in till this mornin' the phone comp'ny fellers asked me where it was."

Everhard jumped into the car. "On your way, Mike."

They took the turn, hit a seldom used road where dust and sand had drifted. The heavy cord tires bit into it. A two-story house with no light showing lay ahead.

THERE was no car at the front of the house, no car in the driveway beside the house.

"I hope they's somebody home," Mike growled as the limousine roared up, stopped with terrific jam of brakes.

Everhard had caught a hazy glimpse of a man's dim shape and instantly switched out the lights. A man started forward, said, "God, fellers. I'm glad you come!" Then, anxiously, "But is—is the Killer with you?" He sounded aware of having bungled; did not want to meet the Killer.

The man was on Mike's side of the car, and Mike's answer was, "You are damned right he is!"

Mike's burly body seemed hurled from the seat, out of the door. He plunged straight at the thrusting flame flash. The man fired twice with, it seemed, Mike almost on top of him. Everhard could not shoot; Mike was between him and the man.

There was a scream, then a whimper —"Give a guy a break!" The gun went off a third time, straight overhead, with Mike's hand on the man's wrist. A howl, a blubbered groan, a moment's confused movement as if a rat struggled with a mastiff and a dark form swung into the air, came down with a thud, lay still.

Mike said, grimly pleased, "I broke his neck!"

Everhard came up, flashed on the light, looked the bare-headed Mike over. "It's all right, Mike. But I'd like to have talked to him first. Where'd he hit you?"

"Hit, hell! I ain't hit. Just wasn't in the cards, and if it ain't—say, if he'd shot me through the heart, I'd still have killed him. Or anybody else that touched her!"

Everhard lighted the ground, picked up Mike's cap. There was a hole in the crown. He set it crookedly on Mike's head. "Let's have a look inside."

Everhard took the key from the car, put it into his pocket just on the chance that somebody might break from hiding, make off with the car. He tried the front door. It was locked. He winked the flashlight through a window. No curtains were up. The house was unfurnished. Instantly he said, "Rinsko!"

"What you mean, Rinsko?"

"That's his trick. He uses empty houses. In that way he doesn't have to contact agents, owners or landladies. Spotted this house and sent a messenger boy with a deposit to the phone company."

They ran to the back door. It was unlocked. Everhard stepped inside, shouted. No answer. His voice rang through the empty house. He played the flashlight about.

"Funny, only one man was here. No car. Hm."

He saw that the blinds were down in the kitchen, saw candles had been used. One, its end daubed with melted wax, was upright on the drain board. There was an empty pint of whisky, two beer bottles, and such wax paper as comes about sandwiches. Cigarette butts were ground into the floor.

"Stay here by the kitchen door. If you hear anything, sing out."

"Sure."

Everhard opened a door, played his light in another empty room. The house had long been vacant. There was much dust on the floor and foot tracks in the dust—among them a woman's.

He heard a sound, went into the hall. Behind the stairs he found Helen, bound, gagged, lying in blood. He stooped, throwing the light on her face. Her eyes were open.

He dropped to his knees beside her, shook her gently. The eyes closed. There was no answer. He tucked the burning flashlight up into an arm pit, drew a knife. Her arms were tied behind her with electric wire, her ankles bound with wire, her mouth gagged with cloth torn from her skirt. He cut the tape that held the gag, pulled out the rags. Helen moaned, rolled her head to one side.

Mike came stumbling through the darkness, saw Helen, bloody and bruised. He began to swear, dropped to his knees. "Here." Everhard gave him the knife. "Cut the wire."

Her scalp had been laid open with something resembling a gun's muzzle. Her red hair was clotted and wet; her face had been beaten. She mumbled, "Water."

"Pick her up, Mike. Let's get out of here."

The telephone began to ring. In the empty house it sounded like a gong. Guided by the ringing Everhard found the wall phone, took off the receiver, put it to his ear, hopeful of learning something. He said, "Hello, hello" in a false voice. No sound came through. He played the light in puzzled inquiry and found the receiver cord had been torn from the box.

Everhard threw down the receiver, then picked it up, wiped it off with his handkerchief. His flashlight guided Mike, carrying the girl, into the kitchen.

Everhard, handkerchief in hand, turned on the tap at the kitchen sink. There was no water.

"From the look of things, Mike, they didn't intend to use this place more than a few hours. As I said, they had the phone put in, probably by a messenger boy with a deposit. If I had fallen into the trap, gone to Verdugo Bridge, nobody would ever have thought of the telephone call. All right. Let's go. Get into the back of the car with her. I'll drive."

As the car started off, Mike asked, "Where we going? Hospital?"

"Never. I know a doctor that treats gunshot wounds—at least he has treated mine—and keeps his mouth shut. She'll be safe with him."

IT WAS a little after 5 A. M. when a tall doctor smiled down at Helen, asked, "How do you feel?"

She said, "Let me have a mirror and I can tell you better."

She was bruised from head to feet. She had a black eye, a cut cheek; her nose was swollen, but no bones were broken and her skull had not been fractured. She had been struck a glancing blow with a gun muzzle that tore her scalp. The doctor had shaved and sewn the wound.

Helen looked at herself in the mirror, said, "I'm feeling worse than I hoped!" and gave back the mirror. "I don't want to see myself again for a month."

She took hold of Everhard's hand, gripped it hard. She looked past him at Mike. Helen said, "I never thought a fat man could look so handsome to me!"

Mike flushed. "Aw, I ain't fat, Miss Helen. I'm just big. I growed that way!"

The doctor said to Everhard, "I'll take care of her here. Nobody will know but the nurse and she won't talk."

Mike said, "It sure took a lot of courage when they had a gun at your head!"

Helen snapped, "Courage nothing! I was just *mad!* I drove up to see my aunt at La Canada. Had dinner with her. When I went out to my car a girl was sitting there—in it. I didn't get a good look at her face. I said, 'Oh, who went off and left you?' Two men stepped out. Both had guns. One said, 'You are coming with us.' The girl said, 'Don't be frightened, Miss Richmond. You just happen to fit into the scheme, that's all.' Anybody would have taken her for a nice girl. She wasn't coarse and had a cool voice. She said to the men, 'Take her to the house. Wait for your call, then make her call him.'

"Then put me in a sedan, plastered my eyes. One sat in the back seat with me. I thought they would never stop driving. They talked and I learned they were going to try to use me to get hold of you, Don. I tried to talk, but the bum in back hit me. They drove and drove. I could tell they were off the pavement. Then they took me into the house. I knew it was an empty house from the way their voices sounded—like echoes. They ate some sandwiches and had drinks. I was sitting on the floor. I could hear them eating.

"Then the telephone rang. One went in and answered it. The other stayed with me. The fellow who had answered it came back and said, 'All set. Our move now. They've got her car over by the bridge.' The other one said, 'He won't be so damn hard after the Killer gets through with him.'

"They took the tape off my eyes and told me, 'Kid, you've got just one chance to get out of this alive!' Then they told me I was to call you and say I had had an accident on the road up by the Verdugo Bridge. I knew from the way I had heard them talk that they meant to make you pay a ransom, but they weren't going to let you go. They were going to let the man they called 'Killer' kill you.

"So I went to the telephone. I was

scared, all right. At first I thought I would sound more scared than I was and in that way I would make you suspect something was wrong. Then I said to myself, 'To hell with that. I don't care what they do to me!' So I yelled, 'Don't go!' Then I yanked the receiver as hard as I could to pull the cord out. I knew that would put the phone out of order.

"I thought they would kill me. They nearly did. They hit and beat me until I was unconscious. When I came to, I lay still.

"They were frightened and worried. They didn't know what to do. The phone wouldn't work, so they couldn't ask anybody. They would have killed me, but they had been told to hold me there until they got word what to do. If I hadn't ached all over I would have laughed. They quarreled, blaming each other. They knew that their boss—and they were surely afraid of him—'Killer' they called him—was sitting in my car by the bridge, waiting for you to come."

Helen stopped, looked straight at Everhard. "I want a drink!"

He said to the doctor, "All right. Give her brandy. I suppose, under the circumstances, I'll have to buy her a distillery."

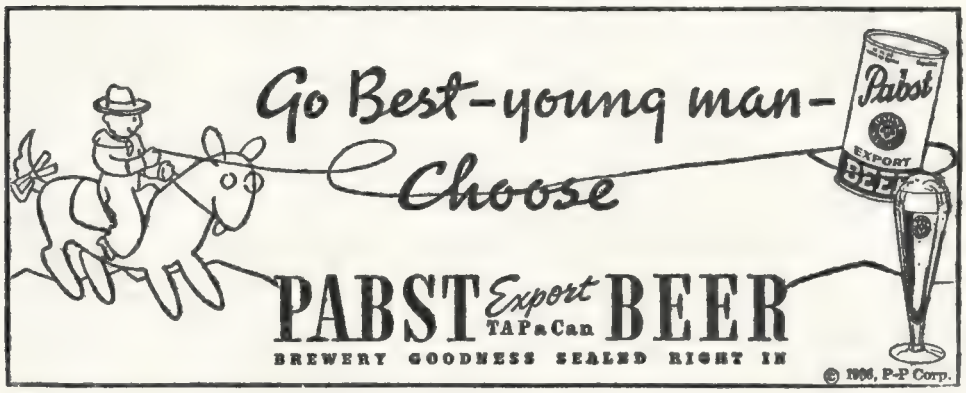
Helen took the drink. "They quarreled over which was to take the car and make for the Bridge to tell their boss and his gang that it was all off. They tossed a coin to see which would go. Then one of them went out to the car and got wire to tie my arms and feet. The other drove off. I tried to talk to the fellow that stayed with me. I told him the best thing for his health was to take me to you. That made him mad. He kicked me. That made me mad. I yelled at him. He said he would fix me. He tore my skirt and made a gag. I tried to bite him but he stuffed it into my mouth. I thought he was going to kill me. He kicked and beat me. Then I didn't know anything until I came to in Mike's arms in the car. I don't remember seeing you at all. If I looked right at you I must have been out of my head."

Everhard kissed her good-by and he and Mike started off. She called, "Mike! You great big bum, you can't run out on me like that! Come back here and kiss me! I know how I look, so shut your eyes if you want, but—you come here!"

Mike said, "Aw," and stooped over. She grabbed him by the neck, hugged hard, said, "You are a darling!"

Mike blushed and nervously stepped on his own toes.

THE papers made a big splash over the so-called gang-war. They hooked up the killing of Packy, the so-called "suicide" of Brown, with the death of the machine gunner at the Tremaine and made a big noise about the mystery of the wheel-chair-cripple who was not identified. The



body of the man with the broken neck was found up on Leaf Avenue, and he, too, was spotted as a gangster. There was a big search for the "Doctor" who had called at the Tremaine and for the "beautiful girl" with the red feather in her hat. The police had nothing to work on but the elderly clerk's confused description. The mystified and badly puzzled gangsters were not telling the police anything. They didn't know just what had hit them, for Everhard sat tight, went about his business as if nothing had happened. He began to think Killer Lynn had gone back to the safety zones.

Then two days later the body of Madge Banks, who had been Brown's secretary, was found in a ditch by the roadside near Culver City. That added to newspaper excitement. To Everhard it was clear enough that some of the gang had got hold of her, and either by getting her drunk or by torture, had found out that she double-crossed them.

One afternoon Wilkins called up, sounded excited. "Mr. Everhard?"

"Speaking."

"Something terrible! Borgan has been kidnaped."

"From the Club?"

"No. The hospital. It wasn't a real hospital. Private sanitarium. He was in the habit of going out to sit in the sun and read. Yesterday he disappeared. Just vanished."

"So?"

"At first we thought he had taken it into his head to run off. Very nervous. We thought maybe he had gone off to hide."

"Then what?"

"About noon today Miss Borgan got a letter telling her to expect a message from—from Rinsko!"

"In that case," Everhard advised, "I'd get on the phone and talk to Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, Washington, D. C."

"She's afraid. Rinsko has a way of—of not getting caught! She asked me to talk to you. You have had some experience with things of the kind and—"

"Go to the G-men," said Everhard.

"She wondered if you, if you wouldn't act for her. Handle the—er—negotiations and—you know—whatever is necessary."

"Not a chance."

"If that's final it will be a blow to her. She—she was very impressed by you, Mr. Everhard."

Everhard said, "Hm. Interesting. I wish her luck. That's the best I can do. After all, you know, Rinsko is just a yellow-bellied louse, like all the rest of them. Good-by."

Everhard thought it over, wasn't sure but that perhaps Borgan had been snatched, or something. Borgan was the sort of man, in the sort of business, that Rinsko picked on. He considered notifying the Department of Justice anonymously, passed it up. He would have to make it anonymous because the so-called G-men did not like him. Like most of the police, they thought he had too much trouble with crooks not to be part crook himself. In a way, perhaps, he was.

Everhard began going to the Europa every night, arriving about ten, leaving about one, sitting alone at a reserved corner table, not drinking, not smoking, not dancing, paying well for service, watching people. The management guessed that he had fallen for a Spanish dancer who was the star entertainer and frequently sat with him.

The dancer wasn't Spanish. She was bored by her job, was married, had a sick husband and two babies. She liked Everhard because he seemed human, didn't make love to her. That was all there was to that.

Everhard came in the limousine. Mike always parked it at a certain dark spot on the lot. An hour or so later a man would drive in with a heavy, low coupé, park it near the limousine; then the man would saunter about, perhaps go into

the club bar, have a few drinks, talk, mix with people who were leaving, take a taxi.

When Everhard left the club he never had the limousine come around front, but walked out on the lot, where Mike kept a watchful eye for suspicious signs. Everhard would get in, crouch low, set up the dummy, get out on the other side. When Mike drove off, Everhard got into the coupé, waited a few minutes, followed.

It was much the same trick that he had used to spot Brown when the private detective was following Everhard's car.

Four nights in a row he did that, and nothing happened.

On the fifth night, a little after twelve, the doorman eyed a girl in a street dress who got out of a car. She was alone, but he thought her pretty, so he opened the door.

The manager chanced by, looked her over: Alone, didn't have the clothes, and from the uncertain way she looked about, he could tell that she hadn't been there before. He asked, "Were you looking for some one?"

"My brother," she said and went by him.

He followed a step or two, said, "If you wish, I'll have him called."

The girl went on, not answering. Her eyes darted in anxious search about the room where people were dancing, laughing, waiters were moving. Now and then a cork popped with much the sound of a blown-up paper bag being smashed.

The alert headwaiter met her, noted that she was young, tense, in street clothes. He meant to stop her. The Europa made a point of evening clothes.

"Were you looking for—"

She gave him a look, snapped, "My husband!" and hurried by him, out on the floor. He stood with an apprehensive stare.

The manager came up. "Her brother."

"Brother hell! She said husband!"

The manager began to sweat. "Stop her! If we have a shooting—"

The girl with unapologetic jostling made her way straight to where Everhard sat. He saw her coming, stood up, "Ah, Miss Borgan."

She, breathless, said, "I must talk with you. Father sent me and—"

"He has been released, then?"

"A frightful experien

He drew out a chair.

As she sat down the manager came up. He was mystified, glanced with suspicious disapproval at the girl, gave Everhard a look, took a deep breath, moved off but watched from afar.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars," she said.

"Cheap—for Rinsko."

"But father was tortured unmercifully. He may die. It is terrible. And he must see you. He learned something —you, Mr. Everhard. They are planning to capture you! They don't know that father knows, and—"

"Then perhaps I ought to be more careful." He seemed to meditate. "How did you know to find me here?"

"The clerk at the Hellenic told me I might find you here."

"Yes, of course." If anybody at the Hellenic knew where he was, it was news to him.

"I was afraid to try to talk to you over the phone. I was afraid you wouldn't—wouldn't believe me. So—well, here I am. And please! Father says that he must see you. It is the only way he can repay you for—for—he did try to make his peace with the Killer and—oh, he bitterly regrets it!"

"Where is your father?"

"He is stopping with a friend in Los Angeles."

"The address? I'll call tomorrow."

"Oh, no, no. You must come with me tonight. Tomorrow—father is leaving Los Angeles the first thing in the morning. We are going away because—the nervous shock—terror—"

"But the Hillside Club?"

"I had to sell out. Where could we get twenty-five thousand dollars? Mr. Wilkins gave me the money. I mean, it wasn't worth that much, but he—he has been very kind. Won't you come, now?"

"Awfully sorry, but—" He pointed toward the Spanish dancer. "I have begged her for pretty near a week to let me take her home. And tonight—really, don't you understand?"

Clare Borgan gave him a long, queer look. "You are not at all like what I have heard of you. What I thought!"

"Beautiful girls seem to make more mistakes that way than those who are not so fortunate," he said coolly.

She stood up, bit her lips; then, "You won't come?"

He shook his head. "I'll see you to the car."

"Please, no. Never mind." Her tone was short. She turned, hurried across the floor.

EVERHARD sat down, fingered the menu, did not look up. She paused near the door, glanced back, but he did not seem to notice. She was no sooner out of the room than Everhard gave the waiter a bill, left the back way.

Mike, with cap pulled low, waited by the limousine. He said instantly as he moved to open the door: "They's three guys in a sedan over there that don't look good to me. Pulled in a little while ago."

"Get around in front. Follow the car a girl in street clothes takes. If the sedan picks you up, I'll wreck it!"

Everhard got in, crouched low, lifted Pete from the seat, set him up in a corner, left the car by the other door, ducked low in the shadows.

Mike pulled away; and at once a sedan, with two men in the front seat, one in the back, crept out, following the limousine.

Everhard went to the parking attendant, gave him a good tip; asked, "That sedan with three men in it?"

"Musicians."

"Musicians?"

"I was talking with 'em. They thought there might be a chance of filling in tonight. Waited around till they got tired, I guess."

"What makes you think they were musicians?"

"That's what they said. You know how you stand and talk when you ain't busy. I seen a violin case on a back seat when one of 'em lit a cigarette."

"Nice boys?"

"All right, I guess. They asked me if I knew that fellow called Everhard."

"Do you?"

"I've heard of him."

"So have I," said Everhard.

He swung the coupé into the curve before the lighted entrance, saw three cars moving, each some distance behind the other, making down the street toward the Boulevard. For some miles the Boulevard twisted through the low hills with but little traffic at this time of night.

As he came onto the Boulevard Everhard turned out his lights, stepped on the gas. He was in no doubt at all as to what this set-up was like: if he had gone with the girl, they intended to try to lead him into a trap, grab him; if he refused to go, but followed her to see what he could learn, they meant to kill him.

He knew, as each driver knows, that there is a sort of blind spot behind each car—a certain place where the car in the rear does not show in the mirror, and can't be seen unless somebody turns around. He jockeyed to put his car into the blind spot and knew that driving without lights he was not likely to be noticed. The men in the sedan would have their attention fixed on the car ahead, which was about a half mile be-

hind the girl's. All were going fast. There was practically no traffic.

Everhard leaned to the wheel, peering ahead. He knew the Boulevard, knew what the coming turn was like. The girl's car had flashed out of sight around the turn. The sedan was trying to close up on Mike. Perhaps the men in it also knew about the coming turn. Everhard stepped on the throttle, sixty-three, sixty-five, sixty-eight, seventy; above seventy.

The front wheels came up to the back of the sedan, flashed up alongside. Everhard switched on the lights, gripped the wheel tightly, let his forearm rest on the horn button. The coupé squawked as if the devil had come alongside. He heard wild yaps, excited curses. It was all over in a second. As he passed ahead, Everhard swerved, sideswiped the sedan and it plunged off the road, down the bank. The crash was like ten tons of tin being smashed. The coupé rocked into a swaying skid, seemed to dance on two wheels, almost turned over.

"That's that!" he said to himself.

CHAPTER IV

"A CROOK'S WORD!"

IN TOWN Everhard caught up with Mike, signaled. He ran the coupé to a curb, locked it. Mike could come back in the morning and pick it up. He got in the front seat and Mike sped up, again came to within a block of the girl's car.

"Thought I heard a smash a while ago," said Mike.

"There'll be a bigger one if you let that girl get away!"

When the girl turned into a side street, Mike switched off the lights, followed.

The girl drew up at the curb of a street heavily shadowed with tall old trees. Mike killed the motor, crept down to within a half block of her. Everhard slid out, made his way through the darkest spots across lawns until he reached the porch of the house she had entered.

The house was an old two story bungalow of a type that went out of fashion in Los Angeles twenty years ago. Many such houses remain; they are mostly used for Hungarian restaurants and rooming houses. He could not see any lights in the house, but did hear voices. The front door was open. The voices carried with surprising resonance.

"Another flop!" a man growled, and swore.

"You must not 've worked it right!" said another man.

"If he'd only showed!" said the other voice. "This is one time when he wouldn't have had an out! We'd fixed him!"

The girl said, "All right, all right. Get the can opener and cut yourselves a couple of medals."

"Well," said one of the men, "anyhow, this is one night when I bet he ain't so damn lucky!"

The girl snapped, "He'll always be lucky! He's got something that makes him that way. You spell it b-r-a-i-n-s!"

Both men laughed. One said: "Listen an' learn! If he's fallen for you, he'd have had a chance. See? When he stepped in here, he'd 've got socked, knocked cold. You wasn't so smart, sister! The Killer figured maybe he wouldn't tumble. And if he didn't—good night! Mr. Everhard is through. When he pulls out of that club tonight, the Killer's goin' to be right on his tail. You'll read about it in the papers tomorrow. With pictures—took in the morgue!"

She said, "No? That can't—oh!"

"You sound like you was sorry!"

"Aren't you, to lose—why, he could have been squeezed for any amount!"

"Sure. But I see how the Killer looks at it. He can't go on runnin' around loose. I don't see how he could've, but I bet 'twas him dished it out to Packy and that Sap Brown. We know 'twas him busted in on the hideout at the

Tremaine. An' Sammy up there on Leaf Avenue—no, money ain't ever' thing. A little sound sleep helps!"

She said, "Why didn't somebody tell *me*?"

"Tell you what?"

"That the Killer was laying for him if he didn't come?"

One of the men laughed a little. "Say, you don't know how lucky you are. If Everhard had got in the car with you, the Killer would have come up alongside and—guess the rest of it!"

"You mean me, too?"

"Naw," said the other. "Bill here is runnin' off at the mouth."

"Sure," said Bill, "I'm runnin' off at the mouth. But the Killer can find lots of pretty girls to play with. He can't find many chances to give it to Everhard!"

"We got to find a phone and report in," said the other man. "*You* can do the phonin'. You fell down, so you can do the explainin'."

The girl said, "All right. Give me the number."

"I got it here on a card. Give me some light."

A flashlight winked, burned steadily. This house, too, was unfurnished, vacant. No curtains, hangings, carpets to deaden and muffle tones. Rinsko's trick. They had simply located a vacant house, planned to use it for a few hours. In that way nobody needed to talk with anybody who could later give descriptions.

The girl took the card, put it into her purse. A man said, "Let's get goin'. Find that phone. You tell your story. We done our part."

They came down the steps, off the porch, went to her car, and the three of them crowded into the roadster.

As they drove off, Everhard went back to Mike. He, much like a child that is going to be taken to a circus, asked, "Anything doin'?"

"Hope so. Stay with that car. They are looking for a phone. Most likely be a drug store. If she goes in alone, put on one of your shows. Make it good! I'm going to get my hands on that girl. Make her talk."

They followed the car to an all night corner drug store on Alvarado. The roadster slid to a stop. Mike drove by and around the corner, parked at the side street entrance.

Everhard jumped out. "Get around front. Get going with that show!"

He went to the entrance, peered in. He saw the girl speak to a clerk, and the clerk pointed toward the rear. She thanked him and opened her purse. She held up the purse mirror: she was not looking at her face; she was looking to see whether or not the men followed her. If she could get to the phone and talk without being overheard she could tell her story in her own way.

There was a man and a girl at the soda fountain near the front; a man looking over the liquor stock, another fellow fingered magazines as if making a selection.

Everhard watched her go to the phone booth, saw that she again lifted her mirror before she stepped inside, closed the door.

At that moment there was a whoop near the front entrance of the store; then a loud voice announced, "I'm the Strong Man of the World, I am! I can lick Joe

Louis, Max Baer and Dempsey, all in the same ring, some time, with one hand tied behind me! Who says I can't?"

Mike had started his show. His ballyhoo pulled the man and girl off their stools at the soda fountain, made the man who was looking over the liquor start for the door, brought clerk and soda jerker craning their necks.

Everhard then simply crashed the phone booth door. The girl squeaked, jumped, gasped, "You!"

"Outside! I know a better place to phone!" He snatched her purse from the tiny shelf where she had laid it under the phone while she dialed. He jammed the purse into his coat pocket, took hold of her arm, pulled.

"But I—I—oh!"

Outside the front entrance Mike Connell had thrown his cap down, jumped on it, and did a trick fall on the sidewalk. A wrestler had a lot of trick falling to do if he wanted to convince the crowd that a match was on the level.

Clare Borgan was saying desperately, "I—oh please—I—"

"Don't be noisy. There's one way to bring you. Your hoodlums split the scalp of a prettier girl than you to keep her quiet. Taught me how! Coming?"

She did not speak but yielded as he stepped back, pulled her along.

Mike was now declaring that he could sing just as well as a guy named Lawrence Tibbets. Did they want to hear him? Whether they wanted or not, they would—and did.

ON THE sidewalk at the side entrance Everhard caught glimpses of shadows making their way across the street to see the fun. He held the girl firmly as he slid into the front seat, brought her in beside him, closed the door.

They drove a few blocks. She pulled herself together. "May I have a cigarette?"

"No. I don't smoke. Your cigarettes are in your purse. So is that card with the phone number you were supposed to call. You didn't look at the card from the time it was given you. You were double-crossing those boys when you went to the phone. Watched in your mirror to make sure they weren't following."

She said, "You know a lot, don't you?"

"More than you think. Your pals were right. If I had got in the car with you at the Europa, Lynn would probably have wiped both of us out. As it is—if he was in the car that followed—he is in a ditch. Come across. Let's have the story."

She looked at him for a while. "All right. I'll tell you. You'll probably hate me worse than you think you do. They have my father as a prisoner. They won't turn him loose. Their price is *you!*"

"That makes sense," he admitted. "But what number were you trying to call?"

"The one on the card. I had to get a message to somebody that was waiting to hear."

"Liar."

"Why?"

"If you can tell me the number on that card, I'll believe you. What is it?"

"I've forgotten now. But I looked it up just before I dialed."

"Some day you may say something that I believe. But I doubt it!"

He stopped the car. "From here, we walk. The Hellenic doesn't care how may girls visit a bachelor's apartment, but being careful is a habit with me. I have a key to the back entrance and the tradesmen's elevator."

He opened the door in the entrance hall of his apartment, clicked on the light. The girl took a look about, her eyes lingered on the oil paintings. She said, "Copies of Rembrandt and fine ones! That's a new angle on you!"

"How about yourself? A crook-girl

that know's a dead Dutchman's name!"

The old Chinaman shuffled in; he wore crisp white and padded slippers, bowed.

"Kang Ko. If he likes you, you will be lucky. In my boyhood he was cook on my grandfather's ranch. He idolized my mother, and her children, of whom I had the honor to be the unworthiest. He taught me the *Nine*, or maybe it was the *Ninety-nine Rules of Conduct*, together with the numerous *Nobilities of a Gentleman*. All of which I have forgotten. It was this slit-eyed old tyrant who pulled my sister out of an irrigation ditch into which I had pushed her for the feminine weakness of lying. But he didn't distress my mother with a recital of her son's wickedness. Not at all. He spanked me himself, with thoroughness; settling the matter discreetly as one gentleman with another."

Clare looked at the Chinaman, looked at Everhard. Her eyes were a study in wonder. "And you are the notorious Everhard!"

"And you are his prisoner."

Everhard led the way into a bedroom.

"This," he said, is to be your cell. Kang, bring the phone. Miss Borgan wants to use it."

He pulled her purse from his pocket, dumped it on the bed, examined everything, found nothing of interest except a plain card with a number. He tapped the card, "Your only way out of this hole is to help me. How about it?"

Clare laughed at him. She seemed angered and amused, nervous. She said, "I feel like crying;" but she did not look the sort of girl that cried easily. Then, "You wouldn't believe if I told you, so let it go."

Everhard called the number on the card. A girl's voice answered, "Sumo's Cafe." He hung up. "You were to ask for somebody and that somebody would relay the message. Old stuff; but effective."

"I have to go down and put my car away. I'll be back in twenty minutes. Don't try to dodge by Kang, because you think he is an old man. He will change the sheets, make you comfortable here. Think it over while I am gone."

Everhard went out, shutting the bedroom door. He sat down in the shadows where he could watch her door. Kang shuffled in and out with sheets and pillow cases. After a time he came out, closing the door.

Everhard went forward on tiptoes, stooped low, listened. There was no key in the door. He could hear the girl come close to the door, also listening; then she moved away. He put his ear closer, almost held his breath.

The girl picked up the phone. When the operator downstairs answered, Clare said in a low whisper, "Outside, please."

A moment later Everhard heard her ask in a subdued voice for "Er 2442." She was asked to repeat the number because she again said, tensely, "Er 2442."

Everhard turned the knob, opened the door, stepped through. He bent down, caught the phone cord and jerked it from the plug. The girl gave a start, almost dropped the phone.

"Just in time, wasn't I? Or did I interrupt the conversation? Trying to tell somebody all about it? Well, good night. I'm taking the phone out. Pleasant dreams. You'll need them."

Everhard told Kang to find a key, lock the bedroom door; then he took the phone into the kitchen, plugged in, called a lawyer. He was a big lawyer, not a criminal lawyer; handled much of Everhard's oil business, had great influence and high standing. It was a hard job to get to him that hour of the night, but he wasn't grouchy when he answered.

"Find out for me where Er 2442 is located. You are director or something for the phone company. I have to know, and quick."

"You are certainly an impetuous fellow. I have office hours, you know. And I don't want any part in your—your nefarious activities!" He laughed a little. "Will you assure me that this a a perfectly legitimate request?"

"It concerns a beautiful girl!"

"Oh, in that case. I used to be young! Good night."

Mike lounged into the kitchen. " 'Lo." He moved bulkily toward the ice box. "I'm hungry."

"I thought you would get pinched."

"Me? No." He opened the ice box, pulled out a quart of beer, a leg of lamb, a dish of olives, two big tomatoes, placing them one at a time on the white enameled table. As he talked he then took a loaf of bread, got a knife and fork, pulled up a chair. "I stalled around there and sort of backed up to the corner. I saw the car was gone. Then I knew you'd done the job, so I hiked. How'd things go?"

"We have a pretty captive in our power."

Mike chewed, spoke solemnly. "I bet she makes saps outa both us."

THE morning papers had nothing of especial interest, but the early edition of the afternoon papers came out with banner lines calling attention to two gangsters who had been fished out of a wrecked car. The man at the wheel was dead, the other was too badly smashed for questioning. Both were wearing bullet proof vests, were carrying automatics, and a sub-machine gun ready for use was found in the car. They were driving a stolen sedan. The police believed there had been a third man in the car but he had evidently walked away from the wreck, perhaps been picked up by a motorist.

Everhard said, "He seems to have a charmed life."

He sent the papers in to the girl on Kang's breakfast tray, did not go near her himself.

Before noon the lawyer called up; said, "See here, Don. That number you want is at the Tripton Hotel. Something a little funny about it. Doesn't go through the hotel switchboard. Room 34. It is an unlisted special. And don't ever tell that I told you."

Everhard looked up the Tripton's address in the phone book, took a taxi.

The Tripton was on a corner, well away from the business district. It seemed a solid, family type of hotel, was probably well filled with retired old ladies who had sizeable incomes.

A pleasant young man faced him across the desk. Everhard said that he was looking for rooms suitable for his sister and her daughter, might use them himself until his sister came from the east.

When he was shown into Suite 32, Everhard said he liked these rooms. He paid a week's rent, went away.

That evening he saw that Clare Borgan was fed and locked up. He did not go near her; thought it best to let her stew in her own worries.

From a drug store near the Tripton he called Er 2442. No answer.

He went up to his new rooms, opened the hall door slightly, turned out the lights and, with a black handkerchief fitted so that he could instantly twitch it into a mask, sat down by the door. He waited hour after hour without stirring, scarcely moved except when the elevator stopped at the third floor; then he leaned forward attentively.

A little after midnight the elevator came to the floor, a man got out, came down the hall. The elevator door closed with a soft clang. Night lights burned; the hall was dim. The man passed, stopped at Room 34, drew his keys, bent to fit the key.

As he opened the door he heard a sound, turned, looked into an automatic held by a tall, masked figure.

"What the hell?"

"Inside, with them up!"

The man put up his hands, not high, backed into the room. He continued to hold the keys. That, to Everhard, indicated that this man had good nerves. He moved in, following the man. He reached without looking to the side of the door, clicked on the light; shut the door with push of foot.

Everhard looked him over with hard suspicious scrutiny, was not quite satisfied with his catch. This man was young, had steady eyes, well moulded jaws, none of the crook-signs.

"Ever hear of Rinsko?" Everhard snapped, much as if striking with a whip, watched for the reaction.

"So that's it," said the man coolly. "I don't know how you found out, but to hell with you!"

"Move along into the next room."

The man moved, backward.

The next room was a bedroom. Again Everhard turned on the light. The man continued to eye him coolly. Everhard kicked a chair about, back near the foot of the bed.

"Sit down."

There was some hesitation, but the man sat.

"Put your hands behind you. Hold your wrists stiff and straight."

Everhard drew a heavy cord that was already fitted with a loop, slipped it over one wrist, then the other, drew the cord, made it fast. Next, he patted the man's breast, ran a hand inside the coat, drew an automatic, dropped it into his own pocket.

Then Everhard glanced about the room. The first thing he saw was the picture of the girl he knew as Clare Borgan on the dresser.

Everhard smiled, nodded toward the picture. "What good does it do a man to be smart as long as there are pretty girls to make saps out of us?" The man frowned. After a pause, as if he had thought hurriedly:

"A girl I used to know. She died."

"Not a chance. I recognized her. Know her. Calls herself Clare Borgan. And she's through!"

The man rose up, lifting the chair with his bound arms, tried to straighten up, could not. He said, "You damned, dirty dog, if you have touched her, I—I—" Then he sat down, making the feet of the chair thump on the floor. His body seemed to sag, and there were spots of sweat on his forehead.

Uncontrollably his eyes shifted toward the girl's picture, back to Everhard's face. He did not want to talk, but at last asked, "Do you know where she is?"

"Would I be here if she hadn't told me?"

"That's a lie!" A moment later he added angrily, blood rushing to his face, "Unless you tortured her! If she were out of her head—you dirty louse! You can't win! You can do for her. You can do for me. But they'll get you, Rinsko! Just as sure as there's a God, they'll get you!"

Everhard watched him, not moving; thought things over. This certainly wasn't making sense. He slowly put out a hand, flipped back the man's coat, saw nothing. He moved his sensitive fingers along the vest, unbuttoned it, turned back the vest, eyed the badge.

He said nothing, gave no sign, but stepped back. After a time, "I'll say you have heard of Rinsko!" He had held up, tied, had as a prisoner a Special Agent of the Department of Justice—a G-man. More silence; then, "I'm beginning to see daylight. You are in a bad temper now, so it would be foolish for me to try to talk to you. As for the girl, don't worry about her. She is all right. And as for Rinsko, you're damned right we'll get him!"

The G-man stared, perplexed. "Who are you?"

"Can't say, yet. I would have you

boys on my neck before sunrise. But I'll tell you this much." He pointed toward the small clock on the dresser. "Give me your promise that you won't stir, raise an alarm, for twenty minutes, and I won't gag or tie your legs. I believe in you that much. How about it?"

"What of her? Where is she? How—what's happened to her?"

"Figure it out for yourself. She happens to be with one of the best friends you have. You don't know it; but he is. She had me fooled. I thought she was a crook. I trapped her into trying to call Er 2442. Got the location of that number, and showed up here expecting to nail the clever gentleman that goes under the name of Rinsko."

"No? Really?" He almost laughed, did not smile; but was not yet quite sure. He tried persuasion with, "If that's so, then pull off that handkerchief and let's get acquainted."

"You wouldn't know my face. Wouldn't like my name. You would start probing around to see if I were telling the truth. That would make complication. We'll work out something. You'll see. How about the next twenty minutes? Will you sit still?"

"Yes."

"Good! And good-by. Sorry. My intentions were—well, you know about what happens to the fellows who try to outguess women!"

AT 2 o'clock in the morning Everhard unlocked the girl's bedroom, walked in. She sat up with a squeak and a start as if about to jump from the bed.

He laughed at her. "I am good at guessing. Tell me if I go wrong. You got in with Lynn's crowd back East after he landed in the pen. Made yourself solid. You are either a Department of Justice agent, or in love with a G-man. Perhaps both. Your gang dropped in on Borgan, scared him into something or other. Rinsko and Lynn were after me. You played along—"

"Whatever are you talking about?"

"Now don't start that. The game's over. This is the showdown. Being a woman, and wanting your nice boy to get his name in the headlines for catching Rinsko, you didn't give much thought to what might happen to me if I was snatched!"

She looked at him wide-eyed and a little dazed, mystified as to how he could have guessed; somewhat confused because he did not appear angry.

"Who told you about me?"

"That's out. You are telling me about yourself. Let's see how well what you say clicks with what I know."

"Then you know about my brother?" She was earnest, strained; and his manner seemed to reassure her. "He was a bookie. A big one. And when they turned him loose he—oh, worse than death! A hopeless imbecile. They were furious because—because he really did not have, could not get the ransom they demanded! We—our father and mother were dead. He had been father, brother, everything to me and I swore to God I would get Rinsko if—no matter how! I went to the Department of Justice—saw—he must have told you. He is the only one who knows, but how could he? He wouldn't!"

Everhard sat on the foot of her bed, hooked his hands over a knee; said:

"Just in case you have any doubt, I'll tell you something. He loves you, so don't worry about what he'd told or hasn't told."

"He didn't want me to try. He begged me, but—but he must have told you. How else could you know that I made friends with Lynn's friends and—and—I knew that Lynn and Rinsko worked together. And I can tell you," she said defiantly, "that I have done things that left no doubt as to whether I was a hard-boiled crook!"

"Like snatching Helen Richmond.

They nearly beat her to death. Do you know that?"

"No! Did they? They swore—"

"You better go back and live with crooks some more. I don't think you know enough about them yet."

"Do you know what happened? Nobody knows how she got away."

"Your Raglin, on the quiet, told a different story to Lynn and Rinsko. If they thought Raglin led a girl to the phone and didn't beat her up if she wouldn't talk—well, Raglin's body would be in a ditch. She went to the phone and talked, all right. With a gun at her head, she told me it was a trap. That's one reason I am almost forgiving you! Yes. I know what women will do for a man. I know no G-man would connive at a kidnaping just to get a little glory for himself. But I know a woman would if—well, her man gets the glory. You women stop at nothing."

She shut her teeth, drew back her lips. "You are right. I won't stop at anything to get Rinsko!"

"Ease up." He touched her shoulder, pushed a little. "It doesn't help a damn bit to be tense. We'll get him if he's gettable. Any suspicions?"

He lifted her package of cigarettes from the night table, held out the lighter. "Thanks. No. The nearest to it is Lynn says 'Rinsko says.' Phones calls with a code word to make it authentic."

"Lynn's seen him."

"Says not. Never without a mask in the shadows. Rinsko doesn't trust anybody."

"A lot of hooey. Brains keep in the background. Sure. But they are on the job, personally. Who is Wilkins?"

"Gambling house man. You see, we moved in on Borgan, took over everything. He didn't double-cross you. Didn't have a chance. He's been a prisoner. Signed checks and all that. As his daughter, with Wilkins to manage, we had it all our own way. It's you they want."

Everhard pulled at his nose. "Maybe Rinsko is just somebody Lynn thought up to make it hard for the cops."

"He can't think! All he can do is take orders. And he's afraid of you."

"Wilkins gets orders, too, hm? How?"

"In personal ads and over the phone. Then he hands them out."

"How do they get in touch with this so-called Rinsko?"

"Call some number—it is never the same—and leave word. Somebody calls back."

"Um. You've heard the voice?"

"No. I have wished I could."

"Just supposing you went back to them, told them what happened. That I followed you—followed the car that followed mine, and ditched it; followed you to the drug store, had Mike put on a show, caught you, brought you here; then you got away—what would happen?"

She said in a low voice, "I don't know"; pushed the ash off her cigarette, looked at it, looked up. "Why?"

"Supposing you went back and told that Mike had fallen for you, hard. You played it that way. Mike's got it in for me. Understand? I pay him well, feed him, let him do about as he pleases. That's usually the way to make a servant hate his boss. Ruinous. Therefore, Mike is in love with you, has it in for me. For one thousand dollars, one of these nights he will arrange to hit me over the head, tie me up, dump me any place you say. Would they fall for that?"

"Would you?" she asked, incredulous.

"I think something like that could be arranged if you did your part." He shrugged a shoulder. "Isn't that what you have been trying to arrange?"

"But really I thought you were just a hard-boiled tough killer, too! Of course, after I met you I didn't feel so sure.

Now—I don't know. It doesn't seem quite like it did."

Everhard smiled, lifted his eyebrows. "I thought you would go through with anything."

"I will!"

"Be sure of it, if I am nailed, Rinsko will come in person, take charge. Also, there is the Department of Justice. You'll know where I am. All about it. 'To the rescue!' Maybe the movies will buy it, hm?"

"Yes. I will do whatever you say."

He got off the bed, turned to the door. "Get into some clothes. Do the job as if you hurried. Your story is that you knocked big Mike over with the flutter of an eyelid. Make it stick. Get a thousand dollars to him. Tell him he thinks he is going to use that on a honeymoon for you. Name the time and place. We'll be there."

CHAPTER V

IN THE CARDS

TWO nights later Mike came in, threw his cap at a chair, flapped down a sheaf of bills in front of Everhard.

"New twenties. Fifty of 'em. Met the guy at Sixth and Main. Fat pimply face, and does he love you!"

"Name's Muggler, I think."

"He didn't say. Like you said to, I told him tomorrow night you was planning to go to the beach. Long about nine o'clock. I told him I had it all doped out that when we come to a good dark place I would stop the car, say something had gone wrong. Then I'd get you to have a look, see? Then sock you. Then gag you, tie you up, pitch you in back. That'd be that. Easy money,' says this Muggler guy.

Hope I meet 'im again. He's got a place on his jaw where I'd like to put my elbow. Zowie!"

Mike swung his elbow in a short curve.

"From there, where?"

"We go out to Roscoe and take the road over toward Sunland."

"That's toward the Hillside Club."

"Yeah. Somebody's going to meet us on the road. Three winks of the headlights and I'm to draw up to the side of the road. I guess they're going to wink at every car comes along."

That night about ten o'clock the limousine crossed the railroad tracks at Roscoe, turned right, headed north-east.

Mike called, "How you fellers makin' out?"

From the floor of the car, Everhard answered, "I'm on top."

"It won't be long now."

There were not many cars on the road. Mike expectantly eyed the two or three he met; nothing happened. They passed without winking.

Far ahead near the foot of a hill he saw a car standing still on the wrong side of the road, headlights burning. There was a rapid wink-wink-wink when the limousine was a couple hundred yards off. Mike switched his lights off and on, once.

Mike said across his shoulder, "There they are! All set?"

"Be sure to let me know how many you think there are."

"Yeah. There's a crossroad here. That's why they picked this spot. There's one guy out in front—"

The limousine slowed down, almost stopped. A man that Mike recognized as Muggler jumped on the running-board by the wheel, said eagerly, "Got him?"

"Sure. What do you think?"

"Turn right here. Go up about a half mile. They're following."

Mike turned, swung right. He could hear the starter of the other car whir. "You'll see some oaks," said Muggler. "You was a long time comin'."

The other car, coming fast, was almost bumper to bumper with the limousine.

"How many of you guys?" Mike asked.

"Three. All right. Under them trees. Cut your lights. That's good."

Muggler jumped off, jerked at the limousine door. "What the hell? It's locked!"

Mike eased himself out, key purse in hand. "Course it's locked. Hell, I must be nervous." His fingers fumbled with the keys.

The men in the other car had snapped out their lights, jumped out, came in a joggling hurry. Both of them carried automatics, one held a flashlight and growled, "What the big idea?"

Mike's fumbling fingers dropped the keys in the dust. He made as if to bend down. The fellow with the flashlight lowered the light.

The limousine door flew open as if blown by dynamite. Mike put his elbow squarely on Muggler's jaw. The swing of a ball bat would have been no harder. Everhard lurched out, struck against the man with the flashlight. The flashlight dropped, continued to burn on the ground. As he struck against the man, Everhard laid the .45's weight against the fellow's head. The third man yelled and jumped back. Everhard, off balance, stumbled, went to his knees, caught himself with his left hand, shouted, "Drop that gun!" The fellow started a sidling run, began to shoot. He was cursing as he ran. Three reports rippled explosively from Everhard's automatic and a dark lump tumbled, seemed to disappear in the darkness of the ground.

"Got him?" Mike asked.

"Unless he's foxy enough to play dead."

Mike gave over the flashlight, stooped, lifted Muggler, slammed him down against the other man, picked up the automatic that had fallen, flung it contemptuously as far as he could. He put

his hands on the bodies to see if they stirred.

Everhard then started toward the third man. As he walked he held the light as far as he could reach out from his side. If the fellow, merely wounded, shot at the light he would be aiming some three feet to one side of Everhard. There was no movement of the body. The man was dead, had been dead on his feet. All three shots had hit between waist and shoulders.

He was the fellow in the blue shirt that Everhard had disarmed in the Half Circle and jammed the automatic with sawdust.

MIKE said, "Thoughtful of 'em to pick out a nice quiet spot like this, wasn't it? Just like in rasslin'—if you can catch 'em off guard, you've got 'em."

He turned on the parking lights, lugged Muggler, then the other fellow over so the light was on their faces. Muggler was conscious and moaning with hand to his face. The other fellow blinked and stirred in a frightened daze. There was a lump already rising on the top of his head. Mike, with cheerful bustle, fetched heavy cord from the car, rolled one, then the other over, tied them up, not gently.

"I'm thinkin' of Miss Helen," he explained.

He took the shoe off the right foot of the man Everhard had hit, stroked the instep, said, "Silk. Ain't we particular." Mike peeled off the sock, squeezed the toes, not hard; asked, "What's your name?"

"Go to hell, you—" Mike gazed at him with an expression of one who listened in attentive effort to learn. The names were vile and vicious. Then the fellow said, "Ow! Ow, ouch! Oh, God! Oh, you—ow, d-d-don't!"

"What's your name?" Mike asked gently, easing up.

"Joe Raglin." He breathed hard, gasping. "Don't do that again! God!"

"Feller, you ain't felt nothing yet. All right. He's softened up. If he don't tell what we want I'll turn his toes so far around he'll be walkin' backward ever' step he ever takes!"

"Throw the Muggler in the back of the car," Everhard said. "Shut it up so he can't hear. We'll take them one at a time and if their stories don't click, the cops can come out and pick up the pieces for identification."

"Now that's an idea!" Mike heaved up Muggler about as he would a sack of flour, threw him over his shoulder, held him there while he reached into the car, took the blanket-wrapped dummy, raised it to the seat. "You ain't fit to lay on Pete," he said and dumped Muggler on the floor of the limousine, ran up the windows, came back. He knelt down, took hold of Raglin's toes, twitched gently.

"What's what?" Everhard asked.

"I don't know—it wasn't me had the orders an'—" Raglin's voice rose in a howl. He whined, "Oh don't do that! Give a fellow a break."

"You done worse than that to her!"

Mike put on some pressure. Raglin cursed with a sobbing sound. Pain streaked through his body like a flash of fire. He gasped, "We was to take you and him in the car there and—and Pinky was to drive your car down to Long Beach. Ditch it. That's all I know—Oh, oh—oh! I'll talk! Me and Muggler was to drive you to—to—we was to meet a guy on the road—Oh, don't! We was to drive you right into the private garage under the Club—stairs go up to the balcony office—that's truth! Don't! So help me God! I'm telling it all. I can't stand—d-don't—"

"I'm just showing you a little how she felt!" said Mike grimly. He looked up questioningly at Everhard, saw a gesture, put on more pressure. "Keep talkin'!" said Mike. "There's somepun more you know, ain't there?"

Raglin screamed incoherently, writhed. "Don't and I'll—you—you want to look out for them—ride—they're going to take *you* for a ride—oh!"

"Yeah? Me? Why?"

"They're afraid you'll talk if the cops grab you."

"Huh," said Mike. "That's out. They're goin' to know damn well where he is!"

Everhard said, "We could have guessed that one. The Killer likes to see them fall."

"He'd like to see you fall!" Raglin's voice had part snarl, part whine; he seemed mingling his own wish with the pretense of giving information. "Ow-oo!"

Mike laid hold on the hurt foot. "Let's hear some more. What you mean by that crack?"

"No, no, d-don't! I'm just tellin' you. He's gone nuts. That's all, nuts! This guy's got him jittered! Breakin' in on his hideout that way—the Killer's used to havin' people afraid of 'im! He's crazy. That's all, crazy!"

"Sure," Mike told him. "So are you, too. Anybody is to monkey with him there."

Mike opened the limousine door, brought out Muggler, picked up Raglin, put him into the car. He kneeled down at Muggler's feet.

One twitch of the big toe, a yelp, and the fat-faced Muggler told all he could, confirmed Raglin's story, said Lynn was going to dish it out to Mike just to keep him from talking.

"Yeah," said Mike. "But supposin' it ain't in the cards, see?"

MUGGLER drove the big sedan. Raglin, as being more difficult to handle, was left in the limousine. Everhard sat beside Muggler; Mike sat in back. Everhard turned out the lights behind the speedometer so there was no faint glow on his face. It would take anybody, even up close to the car, a couple of seconds to identify him.

They drove along. Muggler asked, whine-voiced, "Do I get a break?"

Mike spoke up. "You get it in the back if we don't get the break! Just don't make any trouble and you won't need a doctor to help you get on the witness stand!"

Muggler hunched down, drove steadily. After a long time he said, "I'm tryin' to play it the way you want."

They drove between the tall pillars that marked the entrance to the Hillside Club, on up the road, skirted the lighted parking place.

Everhard spoke across his shoulder. "On your toes, Mike. This is likely to be quick, short and noisy!"

"Sure," said Mike. "I got a gun makes as much noise as anybody's."

"Now play it carefully," Everhard said to the Muggler. "One mistake, and you are out. Don't weaken."

"Oke," the Muggler answered in a nervous voice.

He drove up to the Club, stopped before a double garage with closed doors. A light burned above the doors.

Somebody on watch at a window above the light called softly, "Raglin?"

Muggler answered, "Sure. He's here."

"That you, Muggler? Why are you driving?" The voice was sharp, on edge. That was the Killer's voice.

Muggler felt something nudge his ribs.

The Killer snapped, "What's the matter with you? What's wrong? Talk, damn you!" A voice behind the Killer was saying, "Shh-not so loud!" Then the voice—Wilkins', called softly, "Did you get what you went after?"

"Sure."

"Say, they's something funny!" The Killer, always tense, half mad with the strain of being hunted, was nervously suspicious. "Where's Raglin? Raglin!"

"He's hurt," said the Muggler.

"Hurt?"

The hard thing at Muggler's ribs

gouged harder. The sedan was so close to the building that from the window it was impossible to see a second form in the front seat.

Muggler called up, "Damn you, do you want me to shout that a couple o' motor cops tries to stop us—an' didn't!"

Overhead Wilkins' cultivated voice mingled oaths with Lynn's crackling curses.

Then Wilkins called, "Hurry up. Get the car inside! What you waiting for?"

Mike jumped out. The garage had an overhead door; one that swung out and up over the entrance, lying on tracks above the car when it came in. It was a double garage. Another car was there. The Muggler drove in slowly, stopped.

Before the car had stopped, Everhard got out, stooped low behind the hood.

Lights clicked on. The stairs did not come straight down, but were broken by a landing. The upper part of the landing was boarded.

Mike pulled down the garage door, opened the sedan door.

Wilkins, in evening clothes with a gardenia on his lapel, came down on the run, somehow with an effectation of daintiness even in his haste. His face was flushed and eager, and he glanced backwards, calling, "Come on, come on."

No one else appeared on the stairs.

Wilkins leaned past Mike's shoulder, looked inside the car, saw the blanket-wrapped dummy that had been carefully padded with lead to give it weight. He patted Mike's shoulder, "Good work! You're a great boy."

"Yeah," said Mike. "I always thought so, too." He looked up the stairs, jumped, yelled, "Lookout! Hell, what—"

Wilkins wheeled, threw out both hands in wild pleading, "George! No! Put that down! God, man, wait till we squeeze him, then—"

The Killer, hidden from Everhard by the landing, laughed coldly.

"To hell with you! I wouldn't pass this up for a million bucks. You"—that to Mike— "drag the lousy bum out there on the floor where I can—"

"Sure," said Mike. "Anything you want!"

Wilkins still had his foot on the stairs, talking fast, gesturing, pleading. "A half million, damn it! Then you can—"

Lynn snarled with a mad, gleeful sound, "To hell with you! This time I run the show, Rinsko! I've played your game all the way ever'time up to now, but I'm goin' to fill Everhard so full of lead—and you too if you try to stop me!"

Mike gave a quick look all about, jerked out the dummy, carefully wrapped with a blanket, dropped it on the concrete floor, backed quickly around behind the car, got on the other side, put a hand on Muggler's shoulder and both crouched low.

Wilkins was pleading, "Well, let me get out of here, George! That will splatter like hell and—"

"Sure it'll splatter! But you stay down there. You are goin' to try to get this gun away from me and it's—" The voice rose savagely. "To hell with you! Get out o' the way! Here goes!"

Wilkins lurched back against the wall, flattened himself tensely with hands pressed hard against the plaster, fingers spread. A snapping ripping sound, much as if a hundred pieces of canvas were simultaneously torn apart to the accompaniment of a riveter's throbbing; the spinning hum of ricochet splatters, and the blanket about the dummy twitched and jerked as if something alive struggled feebly.

Wilkins cried, "You've ruined everything! Those shots—the crowd—"

Lynn set the empty Thompson against the wall on the landing, said, "To hell with the crowd! I done what I wanted and if you don't like it—"

Wilkins threw out his hands, pleading

desperately, "It's all right, George! You know, old friends—through everything together! It's all right!"

He was looking into the Killer's automatic, looking across it into the eyes of a maniac. "I've got to go quiet them, George, or there'll be hell to pay!"

"Paid, all paid! I got 'im! Said I'd get him! Can't fool the old Killer!"

He came down the steps, slowly, a hatless, thin-faced, pale, wild-eyed man, not yet thirty. The blaze in his eyes was mostly madness, part cocaine.

He put the automatic up close to Wilkins' belly, said, "Turn around here and come on. Let's have a look at the—I like to look at 'em when—"

Wilkins turned around, froze. Lynn's eyes were on the blanket-wrapped form. Wilkins' eyes, darting about nervously, saw the tall, motionless figure that seemed simply to have appeared from behind the car.

Lynn stepped close, kicked the dummy. "Can't you bleed, you son of—"

Everhard said, "Yes."

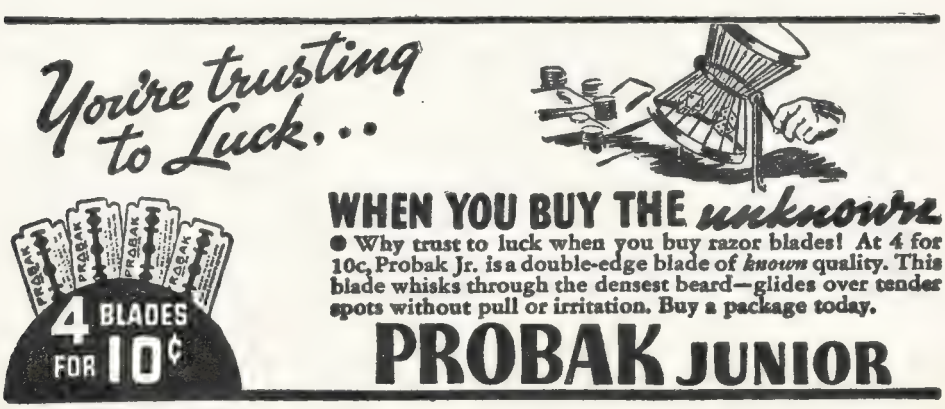
Lynn stiffened much as if hit with a live wire, stood as rigidly helpless. His thin face blazed with terror. He said, "Ow—ow—" and with a whine-like sob, "Can't I kill you, you—" He flung up his arm, jerked the trigger. Everhard scarcely moved; just a twitch of the elbow, seemingly without haste. He fired twice, so fast the reports blended. Lynn toppled forward with arms down, struck his face against the concrete, rolled over on his side with head tucked down as if his neck were broken. There were two holes in his breast; a quarter would have covered them.

Everhard looked up the stairs, raised his gun, did not shoot, for Wilkins, almost as if flying, had reached the landing, vanished. Everhard jumped for the stairs, then stopped as if struck. A gun roared with a blast that in the confined space was deafening. That was not, he knew, a rifle or a revolver. It was a shotgun. Then the body of Wilkins rolled with thud and jerk down the steps, flopped over on the landing.

Clare Borgan came slowly down the steps. She held the automatic shotgun breast-high, with muzzle down, ready to shoot again. She kicked the long lacy blue silk dress from her foot before she took each step. She stopped on the first step above the landing, peered. Everhard reached out, took hold of the gun. She let go without seeming to notice.

"You knew he was Rinsko?"

Her voice was flat, without emphasis, as if she spoke in a daze. "I overheard tonight. While they waited. Waited for you." She looked up, still dazed. "I thought they had killed you and—and I —this gun—I knew where they kept it. I meant to kill them both!"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SUBMARINE GOLD

By Commander Edward L. Ellsberg

second of five parts

(THE STORY SO FAR)

HER DECK a shambles, her crew disabled and battered—such was the toll of mutiny on the gold-laden *Lapwing*, rolling off the Peruvian coast.

Captain Ramsay, owner and leader of the salvaging expedition, had quelled that mutiny, but at sore cost. The sturdy salvage boat was damaged, all but helpless; half of her crew was dead; of the men remaining, only six could be counted on. Six men—to bring the *Lapwing* back into Northern waters, with the gold which had been salvaged from the sunken Spanish galleon *Santa Cruz!*

While desperate, the task was not hopeless. Sorensen, the leader of the mutineers, was trussed in a cabin. The engines were not disabled. Given a break from fate and the tides, they could make Panama.

That was how it seemed to Ramsay, on the night following the mutiny, when he sent his crew below for much needed rest.

But with the following morning, he learned the grim truth. Sorensen had escaped, forced the radio operator to warn the Peruvian government that the gold was leaving their waters. Sorensen had then killed the radio man and escaped in a small boat.

There was no redress. Legally the case could be tied up in endless lawsuits, something Ramsay could never afford to fight. The labor, the heroism, the plan-

ning of years was to be overthrown—but they could fight back, in their own way, and still have a gambling chance for the gold.

Even as the smoke of pursuit blackened the starboard quarter, he ordered the bullion thrown overboard, to sink in the ooze with the shattered hulk of the *Santa Cruz*. And the *Lapwing*, ignoring the warning shells of the cruiser *Esmeralda*, which had picked up Sorensen, fled.

Having thus secretly jettisoned the gold, to escape in the low visibility, to return, drag for his abandoned anchor chain and heave up the heavy Manila hawser and the treasure in a few hours without even putting a man over the side in a diving rig—that was Ramsay's plan.

But a shell from the *Esmeralda*, tearing through the *Lapwing's* stack, hit the wheel and exploded on the bridge. Ramsay, seriously injured, fell to the deck and the *Lapwing*, helm and helmsman, gone, drove full speed toward the surf of treacherous El Morro.

Don Diego Arenda, ex-captain in the Peruvian Navy and Ramsay's second in command, averted immediate disaster, raced the *Lapwing* ahead into the gathering darkness, with the pursuer gaining steadily. And as shell after shell failed to land on the thin decks, he began to see a chance. The *Esmeralda* was there to seize the treasure; with her heavy guns, she dared not risk a direct hit that might sink her and the gold she was supposed to be carrying. The object was to capture the ship, not to sink her!

CHAPTER VI (continued)

RELIEVED, Arenda watched as the *Lapwing* steamed on through irregular geysers of water thrown high above her masts by bursting shells; from stem to stern the ship was drenched with torrents of spray cascading down from these man-made water spouts. But it could not last much longer. Within twenty minutes, perhaps less, that cruiser would be close alongside, able without risking the *Lapwing's* precious cargo, to rake the superstructure with machine guns, kill them all if they did not surrender.

The *Lapwing* was slowly sinking anyway; her bow was already submerged to the orlop deck. And as he scanned the forecastle of the *Esmeralda*, wreathed in smoke and belching flame, he noted that she had already partly closed the range; the shells were coming over in flatter trajectories. It was time to carry out his unconscious captain's plan. If Sorensen, if Sanchez got aboard before the *Lapwing* sank, their ruse in jettisoning the gold would be exposed, the Peruvians would immediately start searching their late anchorage.

Inside the chart room was an undamaged bank of voice tubes. One after the other, Arenda punched the bells, in each repeated the brief order.

"Abandon ship, *señores!* Leave everything running. On deck, *pronto!*"

Below, the welcome order was instantly obeyed by the impromptu engineers. Heavy gunfire is trying on the nerves; it takes an unemotional fireman, shielded preferably behind thick armor belts and stout protective decks, to stay buried in the bowels of a ship while bursting shells threaten every instant to send the vessel hurtling to the bottom with the black gang trapped below. To the seaman, death on deck seems always cleaner, far more to be desired.

Tom, Bill, and Joe belonged in the deck force, and they came tumbling up with startling alacrity. Only Mike, his professional pride hesitating to leave running machinery unattended, paused a moment to shoot more oil on a smoking main bearing; then, with a groan, he left his beloved engine, scrambled up the hatch to join his mates.

Arenda, stripped to the waist, smeared with oil and blood, looked down at them

—a slight figure, no uniform, no gold lace, but every inch the naval officer once more, thoroughly at home, crisp, decisive in his orders.

"Joe! Break out a demolition bomb. Set the fuse for three minutes; place it against the bilge in the fireroom. I will give word when you are to light her. *Sabe?*"

"Aye, aye, sir." Hawkins saluted, started briskly for the forecastle hatch to get at his store of bombs. One, tossed through a port, had blasted the mutiny, saved the ship, though in doing so it had also blown away the deck aft. Another would as quickly blow a hole below the waterline big enough to sink the *Lapwing* like a rock.

"Bill! Mike!"

The two men looked up. They were the only two able-bodied sailors he had left.

"Cast loose the motor-sailer, man the winch, trim out the boom, and drop the boat on the port side fair with the rail, but no lower while yet we have so much way on!"

Bill raced aft to loose the strongbacks and hook on the falls; Mike to warm up the winch. Only Frank and Tom were left below. Arenda beckoned them.

"El Capitán Ramsay is badly wounded, unconscious. Help me carry him to the boat!"

Followed by Frank, Tom climbed the ladder to the bridge, gulped in surprise when he saw Ramsay's battered and yellowed body sprawled limply out. But without a word, he waved Frank aside; forgetting his own injuries, he seized the massive figure of his captain around the waist and straightened up with Ramsay doubled over his shoulder. A giant in strength, Tom stood a moment, steadying his burden; then, staggering across the heaving deck, his bandaged head bent far to one side, he muttered thickly:

"Go first, Frank, an' clear the way. I can't see none too plain."

Down the few steps to the superstructure, then aft, Martin led the way. He shuddered involuntarily as he passed the radio shack. Inside Leroy lay, stiff and cold, past all help, doomed to go down with the ship. Martin pushed aside the flapping diving suits, guided Tom carefully through until they came out abreast the twenty-four foot motor-sailer. The bosun's mate, standing on a thwart inside the launch, had just tossed aside the last strongback, and caught the boat slings in the hook swaying overhead.

"Lend a hand, Bill," cried Frank, leaping into the boat.

CLARK gazed open-mouthed an instant, then quickly reached low over the gunwale, seized his unconscious captain beneath the arms and tenderly drew his shoulders over the rail while Tom assisted with his feet. Frank hurriedly spread a sail on the floorboards.

"How much's he hurt, Frank?" mumbled Bill as Ramsay's legs dropped lifelessly inside the launch.

"I dunno. But he's still alive." He helped the straining bosun's mate lower their captain to the canvas, stretch him out beneath the thwarts. "Looks bad to me, Bill."

Clark bent over Ramsay's bloody features, then leaped to a thwart and in spite of shells screaming low through the rigging, shook his fist at the pursuing cruiser.

"Sorensen, y' squareheaded son, y'll pay fer this if it's the last thing I live to do! Y' tow-haired—"

"Ready with the winch, Bill!" sang out Mike from across the deck.

Bill, recalled to reality, broke off his cursing; without a pause, his clenched fist swung from a gesture of defiance into the signal to hoist, circling slowly with extended fingers as Mike threw in the clutch. A drum revolved and the fall took up, lifting the boat out of its cradle,

clear of the chocks. Bill pointed to port; Mike shifted levers. Another drum spun round; the boom swung outboard with the swaying boat, paused clear of the side, then lowered until the launch was flush with the rail, while Tom and Frank, with steadying lines at bow and stern, held it from turning. Bill looked enquiringly at Don Diego, standing in the waist, anxiously awaiting Joe's return.

"Wot d'y' want in the boat, sir?"

"Two water breakers, this one here on deck already," he pointed to a breaker lying in the passage, "and one from the superstructure; some food, an extra drum of gasoline if you can manage."

Impatiently Arenda looked forward. What was keeping Joe? A shell screamed by, skimmed the top of the stack, exploded in the water not two lengths ahead. With a jerk, Arenda looked astern. The *Esmeralda* was closing fast, not over a mile off now. They must hasten or the *Lapwing* would be captured before he ever had an opportunity to scuttle her. Half consciously he saw Mike lowering from above a breaker of water to Tom, who passed it into the boat. A sack, potatoes probably, followed, dropped heavily at his feet. Tom seized it, tossed it after the breaker in to the cockpit of the suspended boat. Arenda looked at the boat, warned:

"Stores in the bow, Tom. The boat ees already too heavy by the stern."

Tom, stooping on the deck fumbling over the breaker of water there which Arenda had first indicated, shook his head.

"It ain't the boat, *señor,* it's the *Lapwing*. The boat's swingin' on an even keel, but the ship's down so much by th' head, the boat don't line up fair with the ship's rail."

Arenda's eye skimmed from the rail to the water. Tom was right. An optical illusion. The *Lapwing's* trim by the head was now severe; the bow was submerged halfway to the forecastle deck. Lucky he had dogged down the watertight door in the passage through which they had transported the gold; otherwise the water would now be flooding aft into the fireroom, drowning the fires.

Joe appeared, his clothes dripping. In surprise, Arenda saw that he was empty-handed.

"But the bomb, Joe! Where ees she?"

"Sorry, *señor.* The foc's'le's flooded over the orlop deck; that forehold where the ammunition's stored is full o' water. I nearly drowned tryin' to dive through the hatch and swim down, but it's no go. Nobody's gonna get to them bombs now without a divin' suit!"

Arenda's head drooped. The bombs were inaccessible. He must do something else. But quickly now, for there off the quarter, he could see the *Esmeralda,* no longer dead astern, edging off to parallel them.

"We might open a sea-chest, an' flood her that way," suggested Joe hopefully.

Arenda shook his head. It would take too long to unbolt the bonnet of a sea valve or some cover plate on the condenser head. And even then the water would enter only in a small stream, they would not sink rapidly enough to prevent the cruiser from getting a line aboard, and beaching the *Lapwing* before she foundered. But there was another way. The forecastle was open to the sea, already flooded. If ever that water got past the bulkhead, she would flood fast enough. And there was that door in the lower passage. But it was risky. Still, that or nothing now.

Quizzically, Don Diego looked from Joe to Bill. Whom should he order to go down in that passage, undog the door, and face death by drowning when the water poured through? They were both sailors, both good men, obedience ingrained in their fiber. Let him choose one, say the word, and that man would go. Which? Joe, lithe, quick, already

dripping from his futile attempt in the forehold? Or Bill, bull-necked, slow, but much the stronger? No, Joe was better, he would have the greater chance of squirming out afterwards. He turned toward Joe.

A sudden shock rocked the *Lapwing*. A six-inch shell struck the forestay; the sensitive fuse exploded it and the burst came right over the forecastle, jarring the ship as if a giant sledge had struck. The forecastle deck sagged under the blow; the foremast pitched forward. What was left of the bridge collapsed in a heap of wreckage on the bow.

STARTLED, Arenda scanned the damage. A like explosion a little farther aft would wreck the superstructure, kill the crew, and leave the *Lapwing*, hull undamaged, an easy prey. They must abandon ship. His mind was made up. Joe stood the best chance of worming his way up again from the passage. Arenda, with the others, had best get into the boat now, get clear of those terrifying shells. But first he must get way off the ship or the boat would swamp when lowered.

"Mike!" From the winch above, Mike looked down at him. "Stop the engine!"

"Aye, aye, sor!" Mike climbed down from the superstructure, but to Arenda's amazement started forward instead of down the engine hatch.

"Below, Mike! Stop the engine!"

Mike shook his head.

"Y' don't ketch me goin' below now with the ship like this. She might sink 'fore I got up agin." He seized a valve wheel just inside the deckhouse. "Here's the emergency stop distant control to the main steam line. I'll shut 'er off from here." He tugged at the valve wheel to free the stem, then, turn after turn, screwed it home. As the valve far below closed off, the throbbing engine slowed down, finally ceased revolving. And the waterlogged *Lapwing* gradually lost headway.

Mike gave the wheel the final twist to seat it tightly, then sprang out on deck and jumped into the boat swaying at the rail.

"Let's shove off! Nobody's been watchin' the feed on thim boilers fer some time, an' God only knows where the water livil is now! If she's low, they'll blow up under us inny minute. I'd sooner be hit by a dozen shells 'n scalded to death in live steam on this—"

A roar of steam cut him short. Involuntarily Arenda sprang for the launch. Had the boilers gone? Half over the gunwale into the boat, he looked back. No, only the safety valves lifting again. Relieved, he tried to slide back on the *Lapwing*, but found Reilly had him by the shoulders, dragging him aboard.

"Let go, Mike!" he barked.

Mike, thinking he wanted no assistance, let go, but when he saw Arenda, instead of wriggling aboard, drop back to the *Lapwing's* deck, his astonishment got the better of him.

"Y' damn fool! Don't y' know nuthin' about boilers? Y'll be cooked to death!"

But Arenda paid no heed. In the whistling of the escaping steam, it was hard to think. The fires were still going; the boilers were obviously still steaming; but if the feed pumps were still pumping and holding up the water level, that might last quite a while. He could not rely on a boiler explosion to sink the ship; he must be sure.

Before him on the deck were his men. Tom, bandaged, half-blinded; Frank, weak from "the bends." He waved them into the boat. Only Joe and Bill were left with him. Once more he looked them over, hesitated. Mike had refused to go below. From these men, Joe especially, from whose lips he had first heard of the treasure of the *Santa Cruz*, he would get no refusal, no insubordination. But that was the trouble. He, an officer, send Joe below to face death in order to open that door, let

the ocean flood in, while he, as able as Joe to do the job, stayed safely on the topside in that boat? No, it was impossible. He motioned them to follow the others into the motor-sailer.

The *Lapwing,* her headway nearly gone, rolled heavily in the trough of the sea. The boat, swinging a few feet above the water, bumped the bulwark irregularly, protected somewhat by a couple of fenders which Tom had dropped over its side. Arenda looked anxiously at the boat. He must get it into the water, well away from the side, before the *Lapwing* sank, or it would certainly be swamped. In the boat, Bill was shipping the rudder, Mike was tinkering with the motor. Arenda sang out to him:

"Mike, start the engine!"

Mike nodded, bent low over the flywheel.

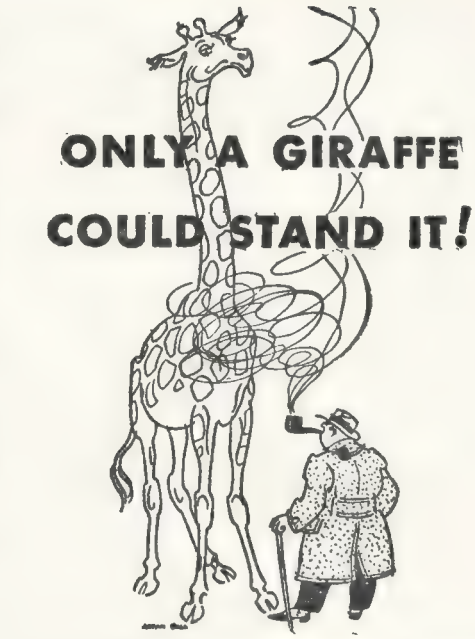
And now to lower the boat. The *Lapwing* still had a little way on but not sufficient to cause trouble in letting go. Arenda climbed the superstructure, seized the brake lever on the winch, released it. With a rush, the heavy launch splashed into the sea and immediately started to drop astern. Tom, in the waist of the boat, hastily reached up while the fall still was slack and cast loose the hook from the slings.

"Lie well clear!" ordered Arenda. "I'll swim out when I return."

"Aye, aye!" Tom grabbed a boat hook and pushed off; Bill, at the tiller, jammed it to port and boat sheered away. Floating high and light, the wind caught it and it began to drift rapidly to leeward. Arenda looked anxiously at the widening gap of waves which he would have to swim, then in relief turned away as he heard the bosun's mate's hoarse voice:

"Mike! Get that engine started!"

TO PORT, the *Esmeralda* was only half a mile off, closing rapidly but still firing, her shells screaming low across the



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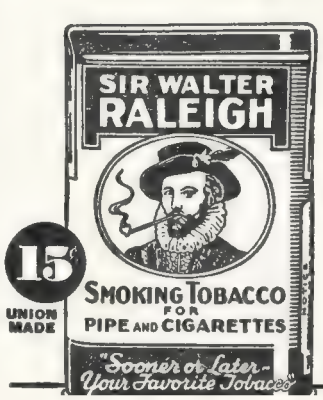

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deckhouse. That sight made Arenda forget the boat. He seized a kapok life-jacket from the rack inboard of the empty boat-skids, and as he stumbled across the upper deck, he slipped it on, secured the ties. He would need it for his swim later. But now he might also need something else. He pulled open the bosun's locker and grabbed a four-pound sledge.

For the last time he scrambled down the ladder to the deck, completely deserted now, and took a final glance around. The trim by the head startled him; already waves were lapping over the ruined forecastle. The stern had lifted somewhat and the ship, broadside to the seas, was rolling uneasily; while unceasingly the steam, roaring out the reliefs, seemed to be mournfully playing a dirge over the wreck. It would not take much to sink her speedily now.

With the screech of safety valves and the concussion of bursting shells ringing in his ears, Don Diego swung back the messroom door, slid down the ladder to the orlop deck, and emerged in the crew compartment. Encumbered somewhat by his bulky life-jacket, he squeezed forward between the steel pipe stanchions holding the tiers of empty bunks, and stepped over the high coaming into the narrow passage leading to the forward hold.

With set teeth, he noted that he was treading ankle deep in water. That bulkhead door, though tightly dogged down, was already leaking. *Bueno.* The water on the other side was therefore high above that deck, waiting only release to serve his purpose.

Grimly he splashed forward. Well he knew every inch of that passage—hardly an hour before, he had traversed it both ways, staggering under the load of those heavy ingots, jettisoning the gold. And now the watertight door. As he remembered, it was hinged aft, opening between two longitudinal bulkheads into the passage in which he stood.

All around the edge of the door, water was squirting in fine jets; in spite of the dogs, the pressure had sprung the knife-edge from the gasket. Tentatively, Don Diego gripped the dog next to the upper hinge, twisted. No result. It was jammed hard against its brass locking wedge by the bulging door. That he had half expected. He lifted the sledge he carried, with one hard rap drove the dog upward, flung it back against the frame, clear of the door.

For a moment he studied the dogs. There were eight. He must be careful or when the last one let go, he might be mashed against the side bulkhead by the flying door. Again he started on the dogs, port side first, where the hinges came, and knocked back the remaining three on that side. Immediately the door sprang back against the loose hinge pins and a flat sheet of water half an inch thick shot out sidewise, glanced back from the bulkhead, and drenched him from head to foot.

Four more dogs left, on the starboard side. First the top one, then the two lower dogs, Don Diego sledged them free, each biting deeper into its brass wedge and driving harder as fewer and fewer dogs were left to take the pressure. And now water was gushing from all around the door. The passage had filled to the height of the coaming, he stood in water to his knees. One last dog only, bending under the terrific strain, held the door.

Arenda stepped back. With arms fully extended, holding the sledge by the very tip of its short handle to keep clear himself, he swung upward from between his legs with all his strength. Unexpectedly, the *Lapwing* lurched heavily. *Diablo!* He missed the dog. The sledge flew from his hands, shot up, glanced off a beam, and smashed the light overhead. Sudden blackness descended on the passageway.

Arenda, off his balance, sprawled face down in the water, came up choking, and completely lost, fumbling blindly to orient himself. His head bumped the door, an unseen sheet of salt water hit him in the face, half strangled him.

He floundered back, feeling for the sides of the passageway, stumbled and fell again, completely submerged. His clawing fingers closed on something. The sledge. Still clutching it, he struggled to his feet, leaned back against the bulkhead, gasping for air.

And then stark terror seized his soul. Caught in blackness, far down in the hull of a foundering ship; close in his ears the hiss of water squirting by that loosened door; at his feet a swift stream, unseen but powerful, sweeping past his knees; and on top of all Mike's last warning about the boilers! Shivering violently, Arenda sagged back against the cold steel plates, distended eyes searching hopelessly in the murk. A curse on that gold! *Madre de Dios,* a light or he would go mad!

But no light came. His distraught senses caught only the feel of rushing water, the shriek of escaping steam, the occasional thunder of bursting shells. It was that last which finally calmed his reeling mind. Those shells! They recalled Ramsay to his mind. Ramsay had not fled, had not surrendered. Determined to sink the *Lapwing* unsearched, he had stuck to his bridge till he had fallen. And now the task was his to finish.

On the bottom, far from help, the divers, each in turn alone inside the shattered hulk of the *Santa Cruz,* had faced death in the struggle to salvage that gold. It was his turn now to carry through, to save it for them. Regardless of the cost, he must not fail them.

His palsied fingers closed more tightly on the sledge. With clenched teeth he turned his quaking body deliberately toward that noise of rushing water, with arms outstretched in the blackness, forced his trembling knees, step by step toward it.

His fingers passed through the curtain of water, touched the door. Everything now by feel; his eyes were useless. He groped for the last dog, felt the door straining against it. Again he gripped the end of the sledge handle, with arms extended slowly raised it up in the darkness, measuring the stroke. He dropped the hammer head between his legs, knee deep in water, poised himself, and swung blindly up.

The clang of metal on metal rang out in the dark. The sledge struck true, the dog drove clear. The door flew open, crashed back against the bulkhead. With a roar like Niagara, the sea poured through. A wall of water hit Arenda, sent him whirling like a leaf down the torrent instantly flooding the narrow passage from top to bottom. The useless sledge was torn from his fingers; he was tossed on the crest of the wave against the beams overhead, spun madly round, sent shooting aft along the bulkhead, washed through the after door feet first into the crew space among the bunks. Half-drowned, he clung to a bunk in the top tier, gasping for air while the water rose around him.

GRACIAS a Dios, here at last was light! To his eyes, straining in the murk, it seemed as if the sun had suddenly risen in that dimly lighted compartment.

Coughing, spitting water, he looked around. Already the room was flooded above the second tier of bunks. Solid to the top, water was shooting in a vast stream from the passage, in terrifying whirls and eddies spreading through the room. Only two feet left beneath the deck beams and the compartment would be full.

Wildly Arenda snaked from bunk to bunk above the flood, head low to avoid the beams, distended eyes fastened on that bright patch aft which marked the ladder up. The water rose above the topmost bunks; the mattresses floated clear. He had to swim.

Sodden blankets caught in his legs, tangled his arms. The swirling water was within a few inches of the beams; he could no longer keep his head above it. With one last look for direction, he closed his eyes, quit breathing, in desperation flailed through the tangled mass of bedding for the hatch. At least, when it seemed his bursting lungs could stand no more, his clawing fingers closed thankfully on a ladder tread. He reached up, grasped the hatch coaming, dragged his weakening body, still tangled in soaked blankets, through into the clear, lay back feebly gasping for breath. Below him the water was now pouring through into the fireroom, flooding the machinery spaces. The job was done.

Weak from lack of air as much as from the battering of that flood, Arenda lay panting a moment, unable to rise. Then fear gave him strength. He must get clear of that hulk before the *Lapwing* sank. He tore the clinging blankets from his legs, stumbled to his feet, and out on the starboard side of the deck.

The forecastle had disappeared, completely submerged beneath the waves. Amidships where he stood, the main deck was awash. Abaft him the deck rose at a strong angle—the counter had partly lifted from the sea. A new hissing joined the turmoil. The water pouring down the boiler gratings had reached the fires. Clouds of steam were curling from the hatches, out the ventilators, enveloping the deckhouse amidships as in a fog.

Arenda took a hasty look and started to run. He was on the wrong side for rescue. He dashed through the galley, groping there through clouds of vapor, and emerged on the port side. Clawing his way up the steeply inclined deck clear of the steam, he clambered up the bulwark, poised himself ready to leap onto the sea, and glanced wildly round for the boat hovering a few yards off to pick him up. Hardly able to believe his eyes, he stared incredulously. There was no boat off the quarter!

Instead, far to leeward, just disappearing in the rain and the mist, safe from pursuit, was the motor-sailer! His heart went dead. His shipmates had deserted him, fled while they might into the fogbank, left him to sink with the *Lapwing* or to swim if he could till the Peruvians picked him up.

Despairingly Don Diego, clinging to the rail, looked about. A few hundred yards off, the *Esmeralda* loomed up, startlingly white against the dark sky, steaming cautiously toward the *Lapwing*. The *Esmeralda,* manned by the sailors of the late revolution—what could he expect from them? A firing squad most certainly. He slipped back on the tilting deck. Better to sink with his ship.

And then the stern under him started to lift with increasing speed, the water lapped round his feet, the smokestack leaned forward crazily, crashed down over the wrecked bridge. The *Lapwing,* poised for her last plunge, heeled drunk-

enly to starboard, flung him in a heap against the towing engine, tangled in a mooring hawser.

Terrified, he fought to get clear of those encircling coils. Drown like a trapped rat? Anything was preferable to that! He tore himself free, fled up the steep deck, flung himself at the rail, leaped wildly overboard, swam desperately away.

He lifted to a wave, looked back. Behind him the *Lapwing's* stern rose vertically in the air, red underbody exposed, bronze propeller glistening, rudder futilely pointed toward the sky.

A sea hit him, buried his head in spray. When next he looked, she was gone. Only a cloud of steam and air bubbling upward, marked her grave. And moving slowly toward him, looking mountain high to Arenda struggling in the sea, was the white bow of the *Esmeralda*. He turned on his back, buoyed up by his life-jacket, and waved feebly for help.

CHAPTER VII

PRELUDE TO DISASTER

JOE HAWKINS looked glumly down at the dead engine in the motor-sailer, flung away the damp handful of waste with which he had been trying futilely to dry the ignition wires. At his side, Reilly rose from the carburetor and turned to Bill who, covered with sweat, was bending over the flywheel winding a lanyard around it for another back-breaking try at cranking.

"No use, Bill; she just won't fire. Everything's wet. What with the mist an' the rain we ain't got a Chinaman's chanst to git 'er started."

Bill looked up mournfully. The heavy launch was tossing unevenly in the trough of the sea, drifting before it. Rain was coming down in sheets, a heavy tropical storm. Ahead, astern, he could hardly see a boat-length. They were alone on the ocean.

Silently the five seamen looked at each other. In desperation they had fought to get the engine going, to keep the launch close aboard while Arenda worked below on that bulkhead door, then pick him up. And instead they had watched helplessly as the boat drifted farther and farther away.

They had paused in their efforts an instant when a sharp lurch of the *Lapwing* showed them Arenda had been successful, that the ship was flooding aft, and any second they would see him on deck, expecting to be taken off. At that, they had redoubled their efforts. While Tom and Frank held a tarpaulin over the engine to keep off the rain, Joe energetically wiped ignition wires and spark

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plugs, Mike primed, and Bill cranked viciously, heaving on the lanyard wound time after time round the flywheel.

But not even a cough came from the wet motor. And then that last glimpse, just as the storm hit them and blotted out everything, of the *Lapwing* sliding into the sea, and the *Esmeralda* nosing slowly toward her.

"Poor Don Diego!" muttered Joe. "What he thinks of us now! I wonder, did he ever git clear o' the ship?"

"Yeah," put in Frank briefly. "I seen him jump from the stern jes' before she went. An' he had a life belt on before he laid below. That'll keep 'im afloat, anyway, till the spigs pick 'im up."

"An' that mean's 'taps' for him." Joe shook his head sadly. "Many's the time he's told me what this gang did to his friends in that last revolution when they grabbed the government. Lucky for 'im then, he was in Washington as naval attaché. That saved 'is hide. An' now they got 'im if he ain't drowned."

"He ain't drowned, not him." Tom tossed aside the wet tarpaulin. "Them kapok jacket's good for keepin' a man afloat fer a few hours, anyhow. The spigs 've got 'im. Señor Arenda may be little, but he's some resourceful bozo, an' they better act quick, 'r they'll lose 'im agin."

The little group nodded sympathetically. That Don Diego was a man. With heads bowed, for all the world like mourners at his funeral, they huddled quietly about the engine.

A groan broke the silence. Startled, Tom exclaimed,

"Holy mackerel, we clean fergot the skipper!"

At one bound, he leaped over the nearest thwart. In their feverish activity to start the engine and rescue Arenda, Ramsay, lying unconscious beneath the thwarts, had been wholly neglected by all hands. With one accord, eager to make amends, they tumbled forward. There, leaning weakly against the side of the boat for support, sat Ramsay, a dazed look on his blood-stained features as he slowly scanned his surroundings. The rain, drenching him, beating down on his upturned face, had brought him to.

"Did the spigs get the *Lapwing*, Tom?" he asked feebly as Williams bent over him.

"Naw. Don't worry over that, Cap'n. She's sunk, safe enough. How 're y' feelin'?"

"Terrible, Tom. My head aches something fierce. A shell burst under my nose almost, that's the last I knew till I came to and found myself staring up at the sky through these thwarts."

"Yeah," agreed Tom, rubbing his own swollen cheek. "I felt that way meself when Sorensen clipped me with a marline-spike. A piece o' shell raked your scalp, but your head's all right 'cept fer some blood. How's the rest o' yuh?" He helped Ramsay to a more comfortable position, slipped a life-jacket behind his head for a cushion.

"So-so." Ramsey looked sidewise. "My left arm's numb. I don't know what's wrong there. Who bandaged it up?" He looked inquiringly into the circle of bronzed faces surrounding him.

No answer. In surprise, Ramsay turned his head painfully from Tom to Joe, to Mike, to Bill, to Frank. Puzzled, he craned his neck past them, looked aft, then asked,

"Where's Don Diego?"

Still no answer. Angrily Ramsay raised himself on his good elbow, searched the boat, then exhausted by the effort, fell back, asked weakly:

"What are you birds holding out on me? Where's Don Diego?"

"He stayed behind, Cap'n, to scuttle the ship." Uneasily Joe faced his captain, finally blurted forth, "The spigs 've got 'im."

Ramsay jolted upright, burst out:

"You damned cowards!"

A look of infinite loathing in his blaz-

ing eyes, Ramsay glared at his men; then, struggling to his feet, he looked out in the mist as if seeking the *Esmeralda*. "Don't you know what that means? How could you abandon ship without him?" In agony he sank down on a thwart. "First Sorensen gets away after Bill's lashed him up. Now you save your own hides and leave Don Diego to be shot! What can we do to rescue him?"

"Nuthin', less'n we try lickin' a big cruiser an' her whole crew wit' our bare knuckles." Soberly big Tom faced him. "It ain't how y' think it is, Cap'n. We follered out his orders faithful like, jes' as he give 'em to us. But things went wrong. I'll explain when y're feelin' better."

RAMSAY listened tensely. There was no questioning the sincerity in Tom's blue eyes. He nodded at last.

"Sorry, boys. I should 've known better'n to think you'd skip and leave a shipmate." He turned his dripping face to Mike. "O.K., Mike. Start the engine and let's get going north."

"Shure an' that's why we nivir rescued Don Diego," mumbled Mike. "Old Nick himself can't start that engine till the sun comes out an' dries 'er up. She's all wet!"

"He's right, skipper," broke in Bill. "Me back's broke turnin' over that flywheel, but never even a cough from 'er. She won't fire."

"I see." A gleam of understanding lighted Ramsay's wan face. "Those damned government-built engines! Many's the time I've drifted out to sea trying to start one, even on a good day. So this one's cooked Arenda's goose!" His bloodshot eyes glowered at the dead cylinders. "Junk! That's all they're good for!" He bolstered himself on one elbow, turned to Clark.

"You've been on windjammers, Bill. Make sail then, and let's get out of here before the fog lifts and the spigs catch us too!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" With alacrity, Bill straddled the forward thwart, opened the bronze gate and cleared the mast step beneath. "Shake a leg! All hands under that mast!"

Ten minutes' hard work, and the mast was stepped, stayed, and the sails rigged. Under jib and foresail, the motor-sailer filled away on the starboard tack, heeled well to port with everything drawing and Bill, aft at the tiller, critically studying the trim of the sails.

Ramsay leaned back in the sternsheets on the weather side. The salt spray, driving across the gunwale, mixing with the rain, invigorated him, gradually cleared his head. Tenderly he felt his scalp. There was a wide open gash clean across the top of his head, caked with blood and matted hair. Something must be done about that. He beckoned to Frank, tending the jib sheet.

"Let Joe take the sheet, Frank. Bring aft the boat-box."

Martin passed the sheet to Hawkins, and dragging out the little chest, set it down in the cockpit. It was locked.

"Anybody got the key?" Not very hopefully, Frank looked questioningly round the boat. A negative shake of the head was the only response from all hands. "Too bad, then." He reached into the tool locker abreast the engine, drew out a large screwdriver, twisted off the lock, and threw back the lid. "What d'y' want, Cap'n?" He stooped over the miscellaneous assortment of fishhooks, tools, sheet lead, the myriad emergency items stowed in the box.

"The first-aid kit, Frank."

"Aye, aye." Frank lifted out a small metal packet, opened it, handed it to Ramsay, who scanned it briefly, then handed it back to him approvingly.

"Everything's there, Frank. You're the doctor here. Sew up my scalp."

Frank, eying him in surprise, saw that Ramsay meant it.

"O.K., skipper, leave it to me. A torpedoman can do anything."

Leaning over the lee rail, he washed his hands as best he could in the sea, then wiped them on the sail. Seizing a pair of scissors, he carefully cut a wide swath in the hair across Ramsay's scalp; with tweezers and a piece of bandage soaked in the rain, he cleared the wound of hair and the clotted blood. Then, liberally dosing the gash with iodine, he took the paper of metal clips which Ramsay extracted from the kit, and one by one, dug the prongs into his scalp, pressed each clip closed, drawing together the edges of the wound, till at intervals of half an inch, a row of metal clips stretched over the top of Ramsay's head from forehead nearly to left ear.

"How's that, Bill?" asked Frank when at last the final clip was pressed closed.

Bill regarded it disparagingly.

"That wuz a job fer a bosun's mate. I could 've done better wit' a palm an' a sail needle, Cap'n. Why didn't y' let me sew y' up seagoin' like?"

In spite of the sting of the iodine burning like a red-hot iron across his scalp, Ramsay laughed.

"Progress, Bill. Stitching a wound's as obsolete as muzzle-loaders and square riggers. These metal clips go with superheated steam and sixteen-inch guns. We gotta be modern if it kills us." He inclined his head toward the first-aid kit. "We want that narrow bandage, Frank, and bind her up, turban-like. Not too tight, though."

A warning cry from Tom. Bill, absorbed in surgery, had let the launch creep into the wind. The boom jibed suddenly, knocked Mike, who was working over the engine housing, flat into the bilges, and snapped back to port with a bang while the sails flapped wildly. Bill came to with a start, jammed the helm up, and eased off hastily. Mike picked himself out of the bilges and shook his fist at Bill.

"Y' call yerself a sailor, huh? Shure, an' I could steer better with a Stillson wrench! The nex' thing we knows, y'll be takin' the stick outa her an' we'll have to row back to Panama! Watch yer steerin' now, an' don't be makin' wise cracks to Frank whin y' should be mindin' the sails, 'r I'll take that tiller an' steer 'er mesilf!"

CHAPTER VIII

DEATH IN A BOAT

UNDER a blazing equatorial sun, the *Lapwing's* motor-sailer lay becalmed on a glassy sea, sails flapping idly as the boat rocked gently to a barely perceptible swell. Sprawled on the floorboards lay her crew, seeking shelter from the pitiless sun beneath a tarpaulin rigged as an awning, spread between a couple of oars lashed to the gunwales forward, and to the brass railing around the coxswain's station aft.

As far as the eye could see, not a sign of a breeze ruffled the calm surface of the ocean. Overhead a blood-red sun burned in a cloudless sky. From every piece of metal in the boat—the bare engine framing, the thwart fastenings, the anchor lying on the forecastle—all sizzling hot from the sun's rays, heated air rose in shimmering streams, surrounding the boat in a quivering mirage.

"She's bone dry agin," mumbled the bosun's mate, his swollen tongue mushing his words. "Yer turn to wet down, Frank."

"Aye, aye." Feebly Martin crawled to the side, dropped a battered bucket overboard, drew it up full. Water! Irresistibly drawn, he bent over it. How his lips yearned to bury themselves in that bucket, his parched throat ached to guzzle it—that limpid, tempting, inviting water! But it was salt, maddening to look at, madness to drink.

With an effort he struggled to his feet, heaved the bucket of water over the top

of the tarpaulin, wetting it down so the evaporation from the canvas might keep the temperature beneath it at least livable. He tossed the empty bucket inside the vacant engine bed, and once more sank wearily into the bottom of the boat.

For four days after scuttling the *Lapwing*, the men in the launch had sailed to the north, a fair wind filling their sails, cooling their bodies, speeding them northward almost at a six knot gait. Watch and watch, three men sleeping, three tending sheets and steering steadily north by west, they had sailed on, keeping over a hundred miles off shore, well out of the steamer lanes, until they had cleared the Peruvian coast off Point Parina, then changing course a little, heading due north for the Equator.

The fifth day the wind began to fail. Earnestly Ramsay had debated with his men whether they should turn back and head for Guayaquil. They were safe on water, a day's supply left in the breaker they were using and water for five days more in the spare breaker forward. Their food supply, too, was ample in quantity, though there had been hard words among the sailors when it was discovered that it consisted of nothing but a few boxes of hardtack, the emergency rations already stowed in the boat, and a half-full sack of potatoes which Tom had hurriedly tossed into the boat just before the *Lapwing* sank.

But Ecuador was just another South American country and they were broke. Before they could catch a steamer for the Zone, who knew what treatment they might get in Guayaquil, penniless castaways from the *Lapwing*, if Peru made demand on her sister republic for their extradition?

So the idea of turning back was rejected by all hands, who had a wholesome fear of languishing indefinitely, with no funds to hire a lawyer, in South American jails. No, their boat was tight, the hardtack at least promised to hold out, and the wind would surely freshen soon. So they started up the engine, its ignition system long since dried out and overhauled by Mike in his off watches, and continued on with sail and engine till the breeze died altogether late the same afternoon.

Under power only, they crossed the Equator sometime during the night, according to Ramsay's rough check on the latitude by dead reckoning, still hoping for the wind to pick up when the sun rose. But dawn came and no breeze. By noon the last drop of gasoline was gone; the engine sputtered irregularly, and went dead. And all the rest of their sixth day at sea was passed with the boat tossing idly to the swells and the crew, thirsty and exhausted, clustered beneath the jury awning aft, hopefully scanning the sea in all directions for some indications of a blow.

Slowly the hours went by. Thankfully the crew watched the sun, a red ball of fire, sink below the horizon. Facetiously, Bill lifted his bosun's whistle and long and loudly piped down for supper—one raw potato apiece, the last of their store, a biscuit, and most important, a solitary cupful of water each, the last carefully rationed out by Ram-

say himself. Two cups of water only, the second one a little scant, emptied the breaker, and Ramsay ordered the spare cask brought aft for use. The little oval keg was lugged back by Mike, who deposited it on the thwart at the captain's side. Tom, the next to drink, shoved the cup under and turned the cock. And then came a terrible discovery. Not a drop of water flowed from the opened spigot!

Incredulously Ramsay tilted the breaker slightly but still nothing came out. And it could not be empty. He lifted one end of the cask—it weighed enough to be more than full. Relieved by the heft of the cask, he knocked out the bung, then carefully rolled the breaker on its side. Nothing flowed out. Whatever was in that breaker, it was not water!

Nonplussed, Ramsay stared at the cask, his bulging eyebrows contracted in a queer frown beneath his bandages.

"Where'd you get this, Tom?"

Miserably Williams looked at the dry breaker, tried hard to think what had happened during those few hetic moments on the foundering *Lapwing* from the instant he had dropped his unconscious captain into the motor-sailer in the boat skids until she had splashed overboard into the sea and they had cast loose.

He remembered the potatoes—Mike had tossed that sack to him from above, nearly knocking him down. And one water breaker also had been handed him from the deck above. The other? Where had he grabbed that? It was hard to remember what he'd done, with all the while those screeching shells bursting overhead, and snapping at him like an excited terrier round a mastiff, Arenda jerking out orders— Arenda? Slowly his face lighted up.

"I rec'lect now, Cap'n. Señor Arenda pointed that out to me. It was layin' on the deck in the port passage under the divin' hose rack, and he said for me to put it in the boat an' to get another one too."

In the fading light of the brief tropical evening, Ramsay bent over the breaker and examined it carefully. At one end the neatly fitted oak staves were gouged as by a hammer and the brass hoops there were nicked and battered.

"Somebody's tampered with this breaker," muttered Ramsay grimly. With difficulty, hampered by the use of only one good arm, he lifted the little keg from the thwart. It was heavy, all right. Resting one end on the thwart, he shook the breaker vigorously. A muffled thumping rumbled from inside.

"Pass me a hammer, Mike. Let's see what's going on here."

Obediently Mike drew a hammer from the boat-box and handed it to Ramsay. Gripping the breaker between his knees, the damaged half down, Ramsay drove off the end hoop with a blow, then the second one. Freed of their retaining hoops, the thin staves spread instantly, the lower head dropped out, and to his amazement, instead of any sign of water, there shot forth a mass of frayed manila strands, which landing with a thud on the floorboards, opened out to disclose to their startled eyes—a golden yellow ingot!

"My God, that! Instead of water!" With an oath, Tom flung the useless tin cup violently to the floorboards, then in a rage kicked it into the sternsheets. "We're in fer it now, mates!" Enviously he looked at Joe, who had guzzled that last drink from the other breaker. "You lucky dog!"

In dismay his companions regarded that bar of gold while Tom raged and the gravity of their situation sank in. Had they only known it before, they might have made Guayaquil while their engine still was running. Instead they had used up that spare drum of gasoline driving northward, keeping purposely well out on the deserted ocean. And there they were, far from the steamer

lanes, drifting helplessly—no wind, no gasoline, and now—no water!

DESPAIRINGLY Ramsey eyed the tangled mass. No water! They might be becalmed for days, perhaps for weeks. Who knew? Picked up some day, six sun-dried corpses in an open boat.

Involuntarily he ducked, licked his dry lips. Now they might never live to get back to El Morro. With parched throat, he stared at the ingot before him. No water. Instead, mocking his thirst, gold.

In the silence, Tom stooped low and examined the bar.

"Cap'n that bar's the last one I brought up. I recalls it plain; it wuz diff'rent from the others, lighter, a little scant on one end, as if they'd run shy o' metal when they cast it. I dumped it on the deck when I come up my last trip from the hold, but you an' Frank'd finished lashin' up the hammocks an' it didn't git stowed along with the rest. An' then you ran up to the bridge, orderin' the rest o' us to stop them hammocks to the hawser an' git 'em up on the rail, ready to go overboard, so I just fergot it an' me an' Frank an' Bill an' Joe all turned to like you said. An' that's the last I ever seen o' that bar till now."

"I see." Ramsay knitted his brows in thought. Mike, he knew, was below getting up steam. Only one person left. "And what was Don Diego doing all that time? Did he help?"

Tom shook his head. "I don't remember him there. I guess we figgered he wuz too little to do much good muling them heavy canvases round an' did it all ourselves. It wuz a man-sized job gittin'

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them loaded hammocks up on the rail, Cap'n. We didn't have no time left to pay attention to Don Diego."

Ramsay began to see light. It must have been Arenda, who, figuring on a short boat trip to the steamer lanes or at most to Ecuador, had seized on that stray bar, determined to carry it with him to give them something to finance their future operations when they came back to recover the gold. No one could complain about his foresight there. And ironically enough, his prudent forethought with that bar of gold might well come to be their death warrant!

So that was it. Ramsey turned to his crew.

"We're in for it, boys. Just one hope for us—to get over in the steamer lanes and trust we get picked up before it's too late. Since there's no breeze, I guess we'll have to row. There's a pair of oars stowed under the forward thwarts. Break 'em out, Bill, rig the thole pins, and let's get to it while the sun's gone. It'll be easier during the night!"

Hour after hour under brilliant stars they rowed to the eastward, grimly quiet after the first few minutes, only the splashing of the blades in the smooth water and the irregular thumping of the leathers against the thole pins breaking the silence. The first watch passed with Mike and Joe on the starboard oar, Tom and Frank on the port side, while Bill and the captain alternated in steering, anxiously watching the compass to hold her dead to the east.

After two hours, Ramsay took Joe's place at the oar, Bill shifting with Frank. It was back breaking work, especially for the skipper, who with his one good arm heaved mightily alongside Mike, with his wounded arm resting lightly on the oar, steadying himself on the thwart as best he could.

Midnight came and they shifted again, Mike and Tom, after four hours' continuous labor, resting from the oars by taking over the steering. Tom took the tiller; Mike, completely exhausted, dropped to the floorboards too worn to sleep, writhing and twisting endlessly in a fruitless effort to relieve the pain in his aching back till it came his turn to spell Tom at the helm.

AND so for two days without respite they had struggled on, hands raw and blistered from the oars, backs cramped and stiff, each swing an agony as rhythmically the tortured bodies swayed to and fro ceaselessly. Dip, lay back, recover, swing forward, dip once more. Thirst drove them on, thirst gnawing at parched throats, at drying tongues cleaving to mouths from which saliva no longer flowed to wet down cracking lips.

For an hour they paused when the sun rose after that first night at the oars. They must lighten the boat. Savagely, with ax and wrench, they broke the engine free from its foundation and uncoupled it from the reverse gear. With a tackle made from the topping lift and slung from the mast, all hands heaved and hauled the useless engine up the side, and poised it teetering on the rail while Bill cast loose the falls. Without regret, they watched it disappear, Mike himself giving the last vindictive shove which sent the engine splashing off the gunwale into the sea, while the boat, suddenly free of its weight, rolled heavily for the first time in days. And then back to the oars again.

But as the day dragged on, the sun, rising higher and higher toward the zenith, burned down more fiercely, its rays literally boring into the skulls of the tortured men at the sweeps; the lumbering boat began to feel heavier and heavier, harder to move; and fevered eyes began searching for something more to jettison. In the early afternoon, they tossed overboard the anchor and chain and all the thwarts, save only the one

used to step the mast and the one they were rowing from.

But the effect on the boat was hardly perceptible. And the sun, shining in their eyes as it slowly sank in the west, seemed to the weakening oarsmen, long since past any ability to perspire, to be vindictively bent on drying up their very blood.

Feebly they rowed on through the interminable afternoon. To Ramsay, crouching in the stern, the cumbersome motor-sailer appeared to be responding to the two sweeps no more than if she were in reality the dreadnaught that his aching muscles made her out to be when, last astride the thwart, he tugged away at the port oar.

Roughly he estimated their progress. Already a day at the oars. At best they had made twenty miles shoreward. Sixty more to go till they were in the path of traffic. Three days more work at least. And if no boat sighted them, another day beyond that to row to the coast.

Three more days of soul-wrenching effort under that sun without water? They could never do it.

Despondently he looked forward at his men. Bill, ordinarily a bull in strength, was still putting all he had into the stroke there at the starboard oar, but it was not much. Inboard, straining at the grips, Joe and Frank, both willing enough but too small at the best for such work, were now hardly able to do more than keep their bodies swinging back and forth in time to the beat of the oars. Outboard, on the other side, Tom, even bigger than Bill, was holding up remarkably, laying back each time with a snap in spite of his gaunt face, the unnatural brightness of his gray eyes. What little way the boat had on came mostly from Tom's laboring back.

And the others? Mike might bear up another day. As for himself, he was now only half a man at any oar, worth hardly more than little Frank or Joe. His wounded arm, rebandaged and bound in against his side, must be left to rest or the half-healed gash would tear wide open. And even his good arm was handicapped by an excruciating pain in his chest which stabbed him at each stroke. Whatever hit him there when that shell burst, must have cracked a rib.

There was no way out. They must stick to those oars, their one slender chance of salvation, until they dropped, unless a breeze sprang up to push them eastward, or—ineffable thought—rain came down to save them.

With lusterless eyes, Ramsay, for the thousandth time, scanned the heavens. No trace of cloud, no breath of wind, nothing but the unbroken blue of the sky and that deadly yellow sun.

He clenched the tiller more tightly, with an effort tore his eyes from the water, brought them back to the boat He must hang on. Unconsciously his anguished body began to sway with the rowers—dip, lay back, recover, swing forward, dip again—endlessly as the tiny boat, a solitary speck on the vast expanse of open ocean, crept to the east.

AND now, after two days at the oars, it was still forty miles from the steamer lanes. Feverish, all strength completely sapped, hands raw with broken blisters, throats and bodies dry beyond human endurance, six dying men lay beneath the tarpaulin, scant shield between them and the death-dealing sun above. When, one after another, his men began collapsing at the oars, Ramsay, scarce able to move himself, had spread the sails again as a last resource, vainly hoping for the wind that did not come. And in a final desperate effort to prolong their lives, in case some steamer off her course might sight them where they were, he had taken the useless oars for stanchions and rigged the tarpaulin as an awning aft. And there they lay, motionless.

Already Frank was delirious. His wasted body had been held to the oars

since by his indomitable spirit only. And now that had cracked; Frank babbled on incoherently of his old days as a torpedoman, then of diving.

"Topside there, topside! Fer God's sake, answer!"

With a groan, Ramsay stretched out his hand, tried to calm Frank. He remembered well. Those words from the depths off El Morro, when Frank in anguish, with Tom trapped inside the wreck thirty fathoms down, had vainly called on the *Lapwing* for the aid it could not render. And how Frank, heedless of his own life there in the wreckage, had by a miracle in the darkness at the bottom of the sea, alone, unaided, cut Tom loose and sent him up, unconscious but at least alive.

"It's all right, Tom. I'll clear you!" Feebly Frank, living again in his delirium that terrible hour inside the wreck, fumbled at his hip for an imaginary diving knife, drew it, clawed on the floorboards before him to cut free the tangle holding Tom, then frantically seized a non-existent lifeline, jerked it four times, the emergency signal to the *Lapwing's* tenders to heave up on Tom. Frank fell back silent a moment, then broke out again, still in the depths.

"Hoist away on the gold, Cap'n. Ten ingots in the bag this time. That's all fer this dive. Stand by on my lifeline, I'm comin' up!"

Frank leaned uncertainly against the rail, then to Ramsay's horror, started to climb the side. Ramsay, handicapped by his bandaged arm, struggled to his feet, lunged for him. Too late.

A plunge, a splash. Frank was gone.

In agony Ramsay hung over the rail, gripping a cork ring in his hand, ready to hurl it, but the endless minutes dragged by, the ripples alongside the boat spread slowly out in widening circles and died away. Frank never came up.

A weird cry. Ramsay twisted round. Tom, wild-eyed, leaped to the rail, clung for an instant to a stanchion searching in the depths, then poised himself for a dive, mumbling.

"I'll git y', shipmate!"

Ramsay dropped the life ring, with one mad sweep of his arm against Tom's knees, knocked him from the rail into the boat, fell on him.

"No you don't, Tom! One's enough!"

"He saved me. I can't let 'im drown! Lemme go!" Tom fought savagely to free himself, clawing, straining with his knee against Ramsay's chest to hurl him clear. With his one long arm encircling Tom and his huge shoulders bearing down on him, Ramsay clung with the strength of desperation.

"Joe, lend a hand! Sit on his head! Bill, grab his legs!"

The struggle was short. Soon they had Tom helpless, with Ramsay sitting on his chest, Joe on his head, and Bill clinging to his knees with a death clutch, while beneath them Tom alternately moaned, begged, and cursed:

"Lemme go, you sons! I gotta save Frank!"

But Ramsay, panting violently, his brain reeling under the renewed pain in his breast, disregarding Tom's ravings,

fixed his dizzy eyes on Mike, who was standing with the life ring he had dropped, back to them at the rail, his eyes glued to the sea.

"Any sign o' Frank, Mike?"

The back of Mike's head moved slightly. Sideways. With an inarticulate rattle in his dry throat, Ramsay collapsed across Tom's heaving form.

CHAPTER IX

LAST GAMBLE

MOANING feebly, Philip Ramsay opened his eyes. It was night. An unaccustomed light glimmered in the darkness overhead. Where was he? Were they saved? He dragged up his arm, tried to lift himself on one elbow, but his broad shoulders sank down helplessly. No, he was still in the boat; the sun had set, nothing more. The light there? Some one, Bill perhaps, had rigged a lantern at the masthead in case some ship might pass in the night. That was all. Despair settled back on him like a crushing weight. And gnawing at his vitals, that unending thirst!

In agony he lay there, all hope gone. The drifting boat had made nothing during the day. Ships with their precious stores of life-giving water were still forty miles off to the eastward. Only forty miles—but to helpless men in an open boat those ships with that priceless water might just as well be cruising there in the heavens amongst the distant stars.

Slowly he twisted his head a trifle and his dilated eyes strained to make out the recumbent figure, Tom. Thank God! So they had succeeded in keeping him in the boat, prevented his useless sacrifice. Ramsay's lips moved in a prayer of thankfulness. If Tom had gone, then indeed he must have given up, ended the struggle with a plunge into the depths himself.

A little calmer, Ramsay lay quietly, staring directly upward at the stars. He was not beneath the tarpaulin over the sternsheets; apparently his flagging mates had lacked the strength to drag him even those few feet into the shade and had left him where he was. Then it was no accident that Tom lay there in the open beside his skipper—Tom, faithful, sturdy Tom, had stayed close beside him, trying to bring him to; finally, worn and weak himself, he had fallen asleep there in the bottom of the boat.

The sight gradually calmed him. His strength, pitifully inadequate against the sea, had failed to save his men scattered dying in that boat. But still they had faith in him. Tom, stretched out there alongside, like a faithful dog guarding his wounded master, typified it. He must not fail them.

Had he done all he could? His massive body had struggled with his one good arm at the oars with them, disregarding all his injuries.

But was that all? What had he, their captain, educated by the Navy, trained in the fleet, done beyond what was obvious to any of them?

Bitterly he thought it over. Any apprentice seaman with two good arms would have been of more value to them in that boat than he, the captain. Water was their need; quickly they must have it or they would perish. And they must have it there, not forty miles away where they could never get that boat. But how? Endlessly his fevered mind went round and round that problem. Water! An ocean of salt water all around, while one by one they died there in that boat for lack of a few quarts of water free from salt!

For them it was hopeless. Aboard every ship in the Navy, Ramsay well knew, they made their own fresh water from the sea. But for that they had intricate machinery—pumps, evaporator

coils, condensers, boilers to supply the necessary heat—a set-up to develop which some of the Navy's most ingenious engineers had given the best years of their lives.

He knew some of the requirements, the difficulties. At the Boston Navy Yard once, one of his classmates had struggled with the problem—Evaporator Bill, they had called him. Ramsay recalled the plant Evaporator Bill had installed on his ship years before in Boston. He, gunnery officer then on that small cruiser, the *Denver,* long since junked, had had nothing to do with the job itself; but well he remembered the result when first they went to sea with that new plant.

No more fresh water call in the morning with the gobs lined up, each with a pail to draw for the day for washing clothes, for bathing, his precious quota, a scant half bucket of water; after which, the master-at-arms on guard, the lock went on the faucet and any man who wasted water on the ship went into the brig. No. After Evaporator Bill got through with them, fresh water flowed in abundance on that ship—a free spigot, no more fresh water call, no lock, all the water any man wanted for any purpose. How they had reveled in it! Soul-quickening recollection!

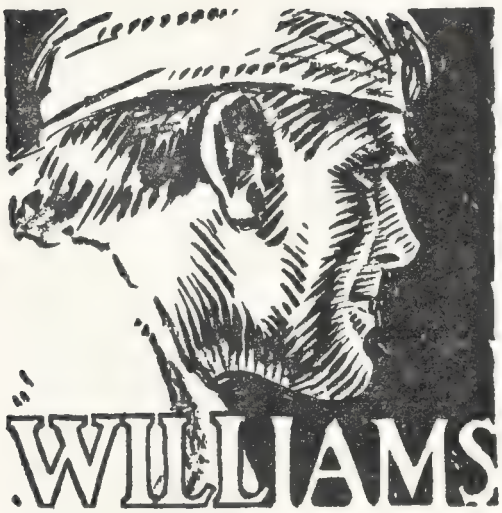
Ramsay's shrunken tongue rattled against his dry palate. If only they had Bill there with them in the boat! Their troubles would be over; with his imagination, Bill could make fresh water for them out of anything. Ramsay groaned. As well wish for the stars. Bill was not there.

BUT *he* was. It was up to him. Yet in an open launch, what could he do? There was no equipment, no tools, scarce any knowledge as to what it was all about, save his vague memories of the *Denver*. With a superhuman effort, he dragged his wavering thoughts together, concentrated his weakening faculties on the task. What, stripped down to bare essentials, did it require?

He focused his memory on that plant Evaporator Bill had built for them sought through the maze of pipes, huge evaporators, steam lines, separators, air ejectors, distillers, and an intricate assortment of pumps, all mostly buried in insulation below the gun deck on that cruiser, to visualize it simply, not in terms of so many thousands of gallons of water for the least possible expenditure of B.T.U.'s, but in terms of a few quarts of water at any cost whatever. As a stark skeleton, what made that plant go round and extract fresh water from the sea? Some heat, an evaporator, a condenser. That was all. Three things. But where in that primitive sailing launch could he get them? His roving eyes fell on the lantern at the masthead. It was burning bright—there must be oil in that lantern, more somewhere in the boat to replenish it. Oil and the lantern. Fine. There was his source of heat, that lantern. Not much perhaps, but for his need, enough.

An evaporator? Some vessel in which he could boil sea water and carry the steam away to the condenser. What did they have? His mind ran over the equipment in the boat. A kettle with a spout would do it. But they had no kettle of any kind, with or without a spout. The nearest thing was that galvanized bucket they had used to drench the tarpaulin. He shook his head. Too big, too wide open. What else? His thoughts ran to impossible objects. Anything around the engine, something with a spout? He remembered. The engine had gone overboard. But that reminded him. Reilly had to oil the engine here and there and his oil can had a spout. And it was a fine size too, a one-quart oiler from the main engine room, to fit over the lantern. That oil can would be the evaporator!

With mounting hope, Ramsay's thoughts raced on. The condenser.



That was hardest of all. What could he use to condense the steam, and most important of all, collect the precious drops of fresh water as they condensed? When he recalled the beautifully turned out admiralty brass tubed condenser assemblies, with all the pumps to circulate sea water through the tubes while the steam condensed in the steel shell around them, his spirits drooped again. What had he in that wooden boat to take its place?

A long time Ramsay, lay, his aching limbs sprawled helpless on the floorboards, his shrunken eyes, burning in their dried sockets, roaming endlessly from the sky above to the vaguely discernible framing inside the boat, seeking what might be fabricated into the intricacy required of a condenser. And at last it came to him, startling in its simplicity. The crudest object he had in the boat—that galvanized bucket!

Hardly able to move, he dragged himself first to his knees, and then by clutching at the gunwale, pulled erect. But he must have help. Dimly outlined, he saw his men, all except Tom, clustered on the floorboards in the sternsheets, dark huddles of half-naked arms and legs, moaning faintly as they slept. He looked at the stars. The night was nearly gone; soon again that relentless sun would return to finish its job. He must hurry, rouse his crew, turn to. He raised his voice in the old familiar cry.

"All hands! Rise and shine!"

But no one stirred, for only an inarticulate mumble, a strange squeak hardly audible, issued from his desiccated throat. Again his cracked voice tried to call. No use. It would take the clarion call of Gabriel to rouse those sleepers so near death; instead of that, he could scarce hear himself. Well, get them up he must, or soon they would all be hearing Gabriel calling in the next world. Tom was nearest. He reached out with one leg and kicked Tom with all his might.

Tom's eyes opened slowly. With his mouth wide open too, he rolled his head apathetically from one side to the other, and sighted his captain, outlined against the sky there at the rail. Without lifting his head he fixed his gaze on Ramsay, but made no move to rise. Why waste strength in futile exertions?

In a cracked whisper, Ramsay murmured,

"Tom, get up! Turn out the others! We'll be saved!"

AS IF jolted by electricity, Tom's relaxed frame stiffened suddenly, came erect. With one spasmodic leap he landed in the waist of the boat; his eyes, burning like an animal's in the dusk, stared wildly round.

"Thank God, a ship! Water, boys! Water at last!" A high-pitched shriek burst from Tom's lips. Uncertainly he swept the dark horizon. "Where is she, Cap'n?"

"No ship, Tom. I just have an idea."

A sharp pang pierced Ramsay's breast as he saw the light die away in Tom's eyes. Tom's knees begin to waver beneath him, then buckle, to let him down in a heap across the bare keelsons.

In the stern, roused by the clamor, sleeping figures began to move; some on

their knees, some half-erect, they crept to the side, queer noises issuing from burning throats, while shrunken Adam's apples bobbed strangely round, all eagerly mouthing just one word,

"Water!"

Like Tom they clung to the rail, searching in the blackness for the ship that had come to rescue them.

"There's no ship, boys. Tom misunderstood." In a barely audible whisper, Ramsay explained. "I've got an idea. We're going to make the sea water fit to drink."

Incredulously they looked at him. Eyes feverish with delirium regarded him a moment, then blinked sadly. The captain's mind had given way. One by one, their brief hope faded; like Tom they sagged down in the boat. Only Bill Clark, reaching suddenly out and gripping Ramsay's shoulder, prepared perhaps to keep him from following Frank overboard in pursuit of his hallucinations, remained on his feet, supported by that clutching hand. Ramsay smiled wanly down at him.

"I'm not bughouse, Bill. Let go!" He might have spared his breath. Bill's momentary spasm of strength passed; his fingers relaxed their hold; weakly he dropped in a heap beside the others. Only Ramsay was left on his feet and his giant strength was going. He looked at his men, put every scintilla of conviction he could muster into his voice. From somewhere he must get life enough into those dried-out bodies to keep them working the next few hours. Hope alone could do it. In a sepulchral whisper, each word a torture, he muttered:

"I got a way. We'll rig an evaporator plant. It'll work too, boys, you'll see. Lend a hand now. Get up!"

Dully they looked at him. No spark of light in any eye, no gleam of hope on any pallid face. An evaporator plant? A mirage. They were dying now; soon they would be dead. Not a man stirred.

Ramsay's heart turned to lead. They were too far gone. Could he rig it himself, unaided? And would such a crude evaporator work? God only knew. If it didn't, he would die. At least he would die trying. A guttural prayer rattling in his throat, he staggered along the rail toward the mast; his trembling fingers seized the halliards. And with four pairs of dying eyes fixed wonderingly on it, he started to haul down the lantern.

IN THE dim light of breaking day, Ramsay scanned anxiously his handiwork, the weirdest evaporator plant ever seen on sea or land. On the keel, wedged between the keelsons, where once the engine had been, was the base of the lantern, its glass shield gone, only the oil reservoir and the wick remaining. Just above the wick hung the oil can, full of salt water, suspended by wires with the long spout forward. And at a little higher level, slung from the boom, hung the galvanized bucket full of sea water, stayed with a few fathoms of the topping lift both to starboard and to port to keep it from swinging. Just beneath its rim, seized to the pail with marline tightly wound round the bucket, was a piece of tarpaulin hanging down in a cylindrical apron open at the bottom a few inches below the bucket and completely surrounding it. Halfway up on this canvas screen, the spout of the oil can passed through a neat-fitting hole punched in the canvas, and came to rest with its point against the steel side of the pail. Below all this on the keelsons was a piece of sheet lead, edges bent up, to form a shallow pan to catch the drips.

The plant was complete and ready to go—oil in the heater, a quart of salt water in the evaporator, a large volume relatively of salt water in the condenser, with its canvas shield to confine the vapor in contact with the cold metal condensing surface, and that flat pan below to act as drip receiver.

While his heart pounded violently, Ramsay checked the job. On that improvised assembly of a few crude pieces of iron, copper, lead, and canvas, his life, the lives of all his shipmates now depended. It was ready to go. With trembling fingers, he lighted the wick, turned the flame to a maximum.

Exhausted physically and mentally, Ramsay sank down alongside the lamp, an overwhelming sense of lassitude flooding him. The task was done. It had drained his last reserve. Only his eyes, incandescent almost, concentrated on that flame, showed any further sign of life. Burning with an unearthly glow, his eyes remained glued on that lamp wick as the slow, the interminable minutes dragged on and nothing happened.

Ramsay became conscious of other eyes besides his fixed on his odd lash-up. While he was working to gather the parts, awkwardly crawling from bow to stern in the boat, a few groans whenever he bumped someone had been the only signs of interest, but now he was aware of writhings and slow movements in the silent heaps that were his men. He twisted slightly to look round. On their stomachs, fingers and toes clawing the wooden planking to push themselves along, he saw his crew with infinite slowness dragging themselves closer, till they lay in a circle in the wide bottom of the boat surrounding the flame, eyeing it wonderingly.

The water inside warmed up, grew hotter and hotter, and the soot deposit on the outside ceased. And then at last the long awaited boiling came, a gentle bubbling and a hissing, faintly audible at first, quickly increasing in volume, sweet music in Ramsay's listening ears.

Slowly he lifted an arm, gently thrust a finger against the tapering spout. It was hot—steam was passing through! He shifted his aching eyes to the canvas-covered bucket, almost afraid to look up at it. Now would come the test.

Deliriously almost, he saw a film of water forming on the cooled sides of the bucket, gather into drops on the bottom rim, and start to drip into the leap pan beneath. A few drops at first, then more, then a steady rain of water, till in a few minutes it lay in a pool an eighth of an inch deep, at least a quarter of a cupful there!

Odd noises sounded from cracked throats as in the morning light four thirsty sailors watched that miracle. Those sounds were meant for cheers perhaps. Ramsay took them that way and a sudden swelling in his breast almost suffocated him while he watched his men dragging their weakened frames up round the pan, thrusting in their fingers, and with the light of paradise in their eyes, wetting down at last their long-parched lips!

FROM the high deck of the *Santa Lucia*, five half-naked castaways, clad only in ragged canvas trousers, watched without regret as they saw their sailing launch settling deeper and deeper into the sea. As his last act before abandoning it, Ramsay had knocked out the stopper in the drain hole near the keel. The *Santa Lucia* did not care to salvage the useless boat and he did not dare to let it drift, a derelict.

"This way, sir."

Ramsay looked up. Breaking through the group of passengers surrounding them, the third officer was beckoning.

"Aye, aye. Come on, men!" With a grim smile, Ramsay started aft. The crowd of gaping tourists fell back, opened a path. Men in fresh white ducks, women, gay in vivid silks and cottons, safe on the decks with every security represented by the great ship under them, with all the luxuries that chefs and stewards and orchestras could provide—what could they know of the stark realities of the sea?

Soon, in sickbay berths, all five castaways were stretched out, safe at last.

Behind them forever was that nightmare of their days under the sun; even the memory of the last two days when, braced up by water and by hardtack, they had manned the oars and dragged the launch the last thirty miles into the sight of a northbound liner which had sheered from her course to pick them up.

"O.K., boys?" The surgeon, finished finally from bathing five cracked and scorched skins with soothing oils, looked kindly round at them.

"Not quite, sor," mumbled Mike. "I'm still thirsty as hell."

The doctor laughed.

"I'm afraid our chief engineer would run short of water for his own boilers if he gave you a direct line to his feed tanks, and we'd never get to Panama ourselves. Don't worry. You've all had water enough for now. And now, Captain," he turned to Ramsay, "just stretch out here on the operating table. Let's strip those bandages off and see what's what."

Expertly, with scissors and tweezers, he snipped away the bandage round Ramsay's head. He nodded approvingly, muttered half to himself.

"Nice job. It's healed beautifully. I'll take those clips out tomorrow. And now let's see that arm."

The surgeon and steward rolled him on his side and started to remove the remnants of the signal flag which formed the bandage. The surgeon looked at Ramsay curiously as the arm was exposed. That glaring yellow tinge where the bandage had protected the skin from the sun stood sharply out against his bronzed chest.

"You're all right, Captain. Just be careful of movement for a while. Nice first aid jobs on your head and arms. Who did them?"

"Two different men. Both dead now." Ramsay looked soberly up at the doctor. Arenda against a stone wall, Frank in the depths—both were gone forever. Why explain further? He lapsed into silence while fresh bandages went on his arm and round his head. And soon he was back in his sickbay berth, his weary eyes taking a last look at the slumbering faces of his men, so black against the immaculate whiteness of the sheets. His eyes paused a moment over Tom's face. Something stuck out there, pressed against his straggly whiskers, a dull red against the background of his pillow. A copper spout. Even in his hospital bunk, he was hugging

that evaporator which had saved them!

Ramsay smiled as he sank back on his pillow. Against his own head, easily felt through the pillow in spite of its rough canvas wrappings, was pressing that solitary bar of gold which had so nearly cost them all their lives. Now it would serve the purpose for which Don Diego had intended it. Cradled against the solitary remnant of his treasure, Ramsay's racked body relaxed. Tomorrow they would be in Panama.

CHAPTER X

CROSSED TRAILS

IN NONDESCRIPT whites much too small for him, Philip Ramsay sat under the palms in Panama looking out over the harbor. The tide was out. Beyond

the sea wall a dismal stretch of rocks, sand, and seaweed extended out into the bay to meet the distant water. A warm glow suffused Ramsay's veins; he felt bathed in a sense of well-being and security after that soul-racking week. For the present his troubles were over; for the future he saw his way clear at last to wealth.

Occasionally he reached inside his coat, reassured himself by fingering the little book against his breast. $19,870. That represented the credit he had now with the Banco Nacional de Panama in exchange for his ingot. Nearly twenty thousand dollars, more than enough for all purposes.

He turned the situation over and over in his mind, estimating his needs for recovering the jettisoned treasure. A seagoing tug, chartered for about ten days, grapnels and lines for dragging, a hand operated air-pump, a couple of diving rigs, in case they should find it necessary to go down and cut the mooring hawser loose from the anchor cable. It was unlikely that much diving would be required. It would be mostly a job of dragging, of sweeping the bottom with grapnels till they hooked either the abandoned anchor cable or the manila hawser and the hammocks stopped to it.

He pondered more carefully the tug problem. Two choices there among the tugs available in Balboa. The *Bessie* was the best bet. Two hundred dollars a day for her, with minimum charter party of two weeks and the money paid on the deck in Balboa before she sailed. That Scotchman, MacNeil, her skipper, was taking no chances with strangers; he wanted his cash in hand before he cast off.

But MacNeil looked close-mouthed and reliable and his *Bessie* had what was rare for a tug, a husky boom and winch forward, which would come in handy in hoisting those hammocks. In three days, if he wanted her, the *Bessie* would be available and they could sail.

Ramsay made up his mind. He would close with MacNeil. By that time, Tom and Joe, whom he had sent out to scout up some diving gear, would have that located. And by the time they got to El Morro, the coast would be clear, the *Esmeralda* long since back in Callao. She was probably there now. Lazily he considered. He ought to check that before sailing south. In the newspaper office in Balboa would be a file of papers and somewhere in the marine news from Callao in the last ten days he might find the *Esmeralda's* return reported.

Ramsay looked at his watch. In an hour, he had ordered Tom and Joe to meet him there on the waterfront. He might as well wait for them.

But Tom and Joe, at that moment buried in the cool depths of the warehouse of Garcia y Perez, wharfbuilders, facing the totally unconcerned gaze of the manager, were not finding the job so simple.

"No, *señores*, no diving suits. Hand pumps for diving, *sí*, all you want," an expressive wave of the hands, "but only thees morning I haf all my diving rigs already rented out."

Out on the hot pavement, Tom and Joe looked at each other moodily. They had covered every one of the contractors on the list which Ramsay had compiled for them, and in each office had listened to the same tale. Hand pumps, yes; all they wished. But helmets, suits, diving hose? No. They were too late.

"Some wharfbuilder musta just got a big contract, Joe, an' he's roundin' up all the divin' rigs in town fer the underwater part of it. Nacherly he don't want the hand pumps; fer a big job like that he'd have steam driven compressors. But it leaves us flappin' in the breeze like a Dutch pennant. Wot'll we do now? That was the last place in Balboa, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, fer Balboa, though Captain Ramsay's got one more name down fer old Panama. But he didn't think they was worth goin' to see. They're only

listed in the directory as junk dealers," replied Joe.

Well, we might give 'em a look. Wot's the name?"

"Bolivar y Cía," answered Joe. "It can't be far, but we'd better git a hack 'r we might find ourselves too late there too!"

Twenty minutes later, when they emerged from the warehouse of Bolivar y Cía, their troubles were over. They had found the only unengaged diving rigs left on the Pacific side of the isthmus—two helmets, four suits—all Navy standard equipment in good condition. How they had ever found their way into the hands of Bolivar y Cía, neither Tom nor Joe had cared to ask. Such things always seemed to happen around government posts. But the rental terms were reasonable, and the deal was closed on the spot when Tom paid down a hundred dollars on account.

"A little cool *cerveza* would go good after all that lookin'," observed Joe, as they came out. "I was beginnin' to think we was gonna have to hijack one o' them Navy salvage ships to get some suits. An' here, right acrost our bows, Tom, is a *cantina*. We got time yet. Let's rest our feet an' cool off a bit."

Deep in the shade of the rear of the *cantina*, they leaned back, contentedly quaffing their beer. Through the arched portico they saw spread before them the whitewashed walls of the crumbling warehouse of Bolivar y Cía. A few curs slumbered in the gutter; a few natives, equally dirty, were curled up asleep in the wide archways of the building opposite.

"Peaceful town, eh, Tom?" said Joe, wiping his perspiring brow. "She's been asleep, I guess, since Morgan looted the old burg back in the sixteen hun—"

A jerk on his shoulder stopped him abruptly. Tom, his widespread gray eyes suddenly contracted, was staring intently out on the street.

"Look, Joe," he whispered sharply. "Comin' outa Bolivar's. It's Sorenson 'r I'm a gyrene! An' in a spiggoty uniform, too!"

Joe twisted round for a better view.

Sure enough, just emerging from Bolivar y Cía, was a group of three sailors, led unmistakably by Sorenson. And on the hats of all hands, in gold letters the name of their ship—

ESMERALDA.

In a burst of voluble Spanish, the Peruvians, sitting down at a table under the portico, hailed the waiter, while Tom and Joe, shrinking back into the shadows not twenty feet away, studied Sorenson.

"It's him, all right," whispered Joe. "Still with the spigs. An' if he goes back to El Morro with the *Esmeralda* an' starts divin' on the *Lapwing*, it's all over with us!"

"The murderin' dog!" Tom muttered. "Except fer him, Frank Martin'd be with us today. I kin spoil that bird fer ever divin' agin on the *Lapwing* or on anything else!" He pushed back his chair, and casually, as if simply leaving the *cantina*, started for the unsuspecting group under the portico.

"Don't, Tom! Belay any fightin'!" Joe leaped up and grabbed his arm, trying to pull back, but Tom angrily shook him off. The commotion, however, was fatal to Tom's plan. Sorenson, attracted by the noise, looked up, then sprang to his feet, whipped out a pistol.

"You ban clost enough now, Tom; Ay tank you better stop dere!"

Tom Williams, looking down the muzzle of an automatic into Sorensen's cold blue eyes, halted suddenly. So Sorenson was armed. He might have known it. Inwardly cursing Joe for his interruption, he gulped spasmodically, choking back his anger, and started sparring for time.

"Put up the gun, Nils. Wot are y' afraid of here? I only want to ask y' a question!"

"Yah!" Unconvinced, Sorensen held his pistol steady on Tom's breast. "But Ay no trust you. Yust talk vere you are."

"It's about Arenda," said Tom. "Did he escape when the *Lapwing* sank?"

A gleam of interest lighted Nils' face.

"Arenda escape? Yah. Ve pick him up all right, but better for him he ban drowned instead. He ban prisoner in admiral's cabin till *Esmeralda* returns to Callao; den he ban executed."

"So?" Imperceptibly Tom eased nearer to the whitewashed pillar of the portico. "An' when's that gonna be, Nils?"

"Oh, not so soon. He haf a few days yet, while de *Esmeralda* gets here an air-compressor." A mocking smile lighted Sorensen's face. "Den ve go back to El Morro, vere Ay salvage dat gold from de *Lapwing*, den to Callao."

Williams, inching toward the column, caught a sidewise glimpse of Joe, a bottle in his hand, sidling in the shadow along the far wall. To cover Joe's movements, Tom burst out loudly:

"Salvage anything from the *Lapwing*? You're crazy, Nils; she's too deep now for any diver!"

"For you maybe, yah; not for me. She ban only two huner'd an' ten feet. Ay get down, you bet. An' ven it ban all ofer, Nils Sorensen ban rich!"

Tom, glimpsing Joe edging within range, strove to hold Sorensen's attention.

"Rich, eh? Take my advice. Nils, an' don't go divin' on the *Lapwing*. You'll live longer, even if y' stay poor."

"An' leaf all dat gold for Ramsay to salvage? It ban lucky Ah see you here in Panama, not in Balboa. Dat Teniente Sanchez says Peru vants you all, und from Panama, he haf no trouble extraditing you." He spoke in broken Spanish to his companions.

"*Amigos del Capítan Arenda!* Telephone Teniente Sanchez quick!"

At that instant a bottle, whistling through the air, caught Sorensen squarely in the chest, staggered him momentarily. Tom, poised for trouble, leaped instantly behind the pillar as Nils, dazed, swung his pistol wildly round to the direction from which Joe had hurled the bottle.

But his change of front was fatal. Tom, uncovered, sprang forward and sent the nearest chair whirling over the table; it caught Sorensen's outstretched arm and the pistol clattered to the floor, where Tom kicked it into the street. Before Sorensen could recover, Tom's fist, crashing into his chest, sent him sprawling backward into the two Peruvians, while Joe, with a wild leap into the gutter, retrieving the pistol, then shouted:

"C'mon, Tom! Make knots now! Here come the bulls!"

(To Be Continued)

SPRING SHOWERS QUICKLY COME AND GO, ABOUT THIS TIME OF YEAR
WE'VE HAD OUR ALKA-SELTZER AND OF COLDS WE HAVE NO FEAR
COLDS
THE STORM IS O'ER AND WHAT IS MORE THE SUN'S OUT BRIGHT AND GAY
THAT'S JUST HOW ALKA-SELTZER SCARES MY OLD HEAD-ACHES AWAY
HEADACHE
LET'S EAT! I THINK THIS SPRINGY AIR GIVES US AN APPETITE
THEN WE'LL TAKE ALKA-SELTZER, JUST TO KEEP US FEELING RIGHT
ACID INDIGESTION
Be Wise— Alkalize
Alka-Seltzer
Alka-Seltzer
Makes a sparkling alkalizing solution containing an analgesic (acetyl salicylate). You drink it and it gives prompt, pleasant relief for Headaches, Sour Stomach, Distress after Meals, Colds and other minor Aches and Pains.
Alkalize with Alka-Seltzer
AT ALL DRUGGISTS
30¢ 60¢
TUNE IN THE NATIONAL BARN DANCE SATURDAY NIGHT NBC NETWORK

THE BOMBING OF DESSYE

a fact article

By Wynant Davis Hubbard

THERE was no warning. Suddenly, as I was about to sit down to breakfast in my tent, the menacing drone of airplane motors filled the mountain bowl, a mile and a half above the sea in which the tukul town of Dessye lies. The sun was just striking over the high peaks with which we are surrounded. Smoke from the camp-fires about the slopes filled the air with a faint blue mist. Through this, coming over a broad pass over the eastern mountains, were four huge broad-winged planes. The droning of their motors increased. The mountains resounded to the roar of tri-motored bombers. There was no doubt. After months of waiting the incredible was happening. The Italians were upon us.

Whistles shrilled in the Mission compound in which we journalists and cameramen were camped. The doctors of the Red Cross camped with us were summoning their men. Natives of the town, men and women, began running and racing down the roads. Mules stampeded, for the roar of the great motors echoed and reechoed, filling the air with vibrating hum.

I stood for a long moment watching the planes come in. They were not very high. The flat rays of the early sun struck on their silver wings and long fuselages, throwing the great monoplanes into shimmering silhouettes against the mountain crags behind them. It seemed unbelievable that those birdlike ships coming so abruptly upon us carried death and destruction.

Then, as I watched, a black object fell from below the leading plane. In a slow parabola it came down towards the airfield below us. *Boom.* A great cloud of black smoke and flying clods of dirt and stones vomited into the air. A bomb. The first. Hundreds of mules and donkeys and sheep grazing on the unused airport stampeded, raising a cloud of dust.

The four planes were nearly directly overhead. I could see two other groups of three each following behind. *Crash.* Another bomb—near enough to shake us. I rushed to my tent to help Waldron with his camera and to get my own. The roar of the ships above increased until it seemed that they were right inside with me. All about us bombs dropped and crashed. People screamed and shouted. Rifles cracked, and then the chattering of machine guns filled the air, cutting through the steady drone of the motors above. With the one thought in mind that we must get into the town to photograph the bombing and the people, I started up the truck. Waldron piled in and our cook and our interpreter. We moved towards the driveway, only to meet Linton Wells coming in, wildly excited. His coat was torn at the shoulder. He waved us to a stop.

"See this!" he shouted to make himself heard above the din and racket all about us. "The town is crazy. Some one shot at me. Don't go—you'll never come back."

Just as we stopped, an incendiary bomb fell two feet from the truck. It lurched and settled drunkenly on one side. The thermite exploded and a fierce, white-spurting fire leaped from the hole the bomb had made. Thinking to get on the hospital roof and picture the town from there, we drove another hundred yards. Bombs fell all about us, coming down with sighing swooshes. One pierced the hospital roof just as we ran the truck alongside.

Two wounded were brought in. Standing them in the sun beside the hospital,

Waldron made pictures of the gaping wounds from bomb splinters. I ran out into the open field behind, to get a better look at the ten heavy ships circling above us. I could hear the curious high chatter of their machine guns as they fired at us and at the machine guns firing at them from the hills. And then *sooooooooo*. I dropped flat. With soft thuds thirteen incendiary bombs lit in the field all about me.

As the thermite caught fire and leaped to fierce life I jumped and ran to the hospital. The planes were moving off to the town a thousand yards away, but bombs were still falling into the compound of the American Mission. A tent of the Red Cross was hit directly and fired. With the terrible chemical inside, nothing could be saved, and the tent and its contents of medicines and operating equipment was burnt to the ground.

The hospital was on fire as well from three incendiaries which had hit directly, all passing through the Red Cross painted on the roof. The cries of the terrified patients inside—there were some sixty—were pitiful in the extreme.

Together with other journalists I rushed in and helped carry the people out. Many were old. One poor leprous woman clung to me as if I were her son and babbled incoherently to me in Amharic which I could not understand. I dumped her on the grass under a bit of bush and ran back to get more patients.

All over the little town smoke was shooting up in great black and yellow white clouds, where bombs were exploding and the grass roofed tukuls were burning. Bullets whined through the air and the few old anti-aircraft guns on the mountain ridges coughed and spluttered. The din was indescribable. Situated down in a great bowl between high mountain peaks, the cries of the townspeople, the shots and explosions boomed and echoed and beat upon us. Constantly the drone of the great ships circling above us formed a sort of background of noise for the uproar in the town.

Then the planes moved away southward in the direction of the lower airfield. For a moment we had a chance to catch our breath and look about to see who was where and what had been done to us. Tukuls were flaring all about town. Heavy smoke swirled over us and there was an acrid odor of burnt powder and hot metal and the stink of roasted flesh. The shrill, pathetic wailing of the native women crying for their dead and injured sounded from amongst the eucalyptus trees which sheltered the town from the hot rays of the tropical sun.

In the Mission compound the grass was burning from the incendiaries which had been dropped. The hospital fire had been extinguished; but one bomb, which had dropped in the entrance to the operating room, had burnt up a case containing most of the available surgical instruments, leaving them twisted, blackened bits of metal. A second room containing four beds, each occupied by a patient, had been hit squarely in the center. The destruction is better imagined than described, for the beds had been occupied.

The wounded began streaming in, carried by their relatives on stretchers or hobbling or crawling as best they might. Mangled and torn, streaming blood, screaming from the pain of shattered limbs and torn bodies or fearfully burnt from the exploding incendiary bombs, men and women and little children poured into the Mission grounds. The roadway was spattered with blood. Figures draped in the national costumes of white shawls or shamas, splashed with spreading red blotches, squatted dumbly under the few trees along the road. Cursing and swearing with fury at the bombers who could so torture a civilian population and so mutilate women and children that they rolled on the ground screaming with agony, we cameramen and correspondents carried wounded to

the dressing tents, put out fires and tried to make pictures and scan the sky, for the droning of the motors was beginning again.

THE planes were returning. *Wham!* A giant bomb fell near the palace on the hill. Columns of dirt and dust and smoke shot high into the air. Another and another. A rain of smaller ones and the screeching incendiaries. Flames licked up again. Again bullets sang and whined overhead and the machine guns began their rapid *tat-tat-tat-tat.* That second coming was far worse than the first. In the surprise and shock of the first attack and the wild excitement there was not much time in which to feel afraid. But the second came after we had handled the torn and mangled, made pictures of the dying and fought the flames of the burning hospital while slipping on the blood-covered floor.

It is a terrible feeling to be under such a rain of death and destruction, to know that no place is safe, to know that you can neither see the death coming nor fight back. We, of course, were neutral observers, but there was not a man amongst us who was not itching to grab a rifle and fire at the heavy planes circling and circling above us and dropping one after another of their cans of death or fire. For it seemed as if the attack was being directed mainly against the hospital and the mission. Over and over again the planes circled over us and dropped their bombs. Their aim was good. It was seldom that they missed us. I counted more than forty-three bombs which exploded within the grounds of the mission proper and nobody has any idea of how many incendiaries there were.

Then, as abruptly as the attack began, it ended. The planes sailed away, having laid their eggs of terror. A Red Cross man, Hickey, came and asked if I would drive him into the town to pick up the wounded. I agreed, of course. Several other journalists were trying to get into town, but we were the first.

The center of Dessye, which is only a crossroads surrounded by grass and iron roofed buildings, had been hit squarely many times. Tukuls, native mud walled huts, were burning fiercely from incendiary bombs. Two such huts had been hit by explosive bombs and blown to bits, the people in them being also blown away. All over the streets lay bits of people and there was a horrible smell of blood and powder and burning things.

Looking over the scene of destruction, I thought of how good the aim of the Italian bombers had been to so hit a tiny crossroad, not once but several times, and I thought of the many attacks launched against us back in the Mission compound and wondered what the explanation for that could be. Because, even if the Italians could not destinguish the crosses painted on the roofs of the buildings, they must have been carrying maps upon which the location of the hospital was marked.

There has been an Italian consulate in Dessye for many years, just as the Seventh Day Adventist Mission has been in Dessye for many years. It is inconceivable that the Italians flying over us that Friday did not have detailed, accurate maps upon which every building in Dessye was clearly marked. If they did, then the attack which they launched against the Mission not once, not twice, but three and four times was one of the most dastardly in the history of aerial bombing and also one of the most foolish. Because, while the hospital was being bombed, while Red Cross tents were being fired and the grounds of the Mission torn up with high explosive, more than fifteen newspaper men, representing most of the press of the world, were right there dodging bombs and watching. There were cameramen representing the three greatest newsreels

of the world making pictures of the hospital fires and bombs exploding about. No matter what Mussolini may say, this time actual irrefutable proof exists that his men did bomb hospitals and a Mission. He can never clear himself of this charge, for it is only too true.

We got into our trucks and moved on again. Another truck was following us, carrying more journalists and cameramen. We were each waving Red Cross, Ethiopian and American flags from the trucks. As we went along the roughly cobbled streets we could see great shell holes and occasionally the dead bodies of men and women. There was one horrible sight of a mother and her two small children, both decapitated by the flying splinters of one of the big two hundred pound bombs which were thrown at us.

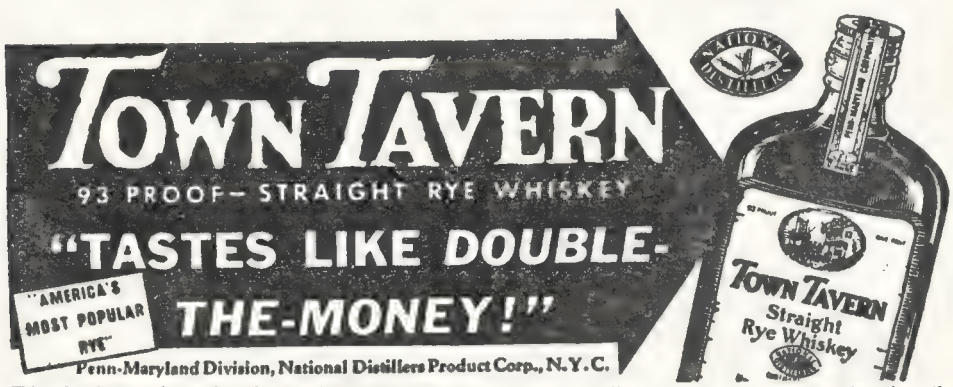
In the small plain below the palace were more huge craters. Apparently the Italians had thrown their largest shots in attempts to hit the palace where they believed the Emperor to be. As a matter of fact he was in the grounds of the former Italian consulate, firing a machine gun.

A shot rang out behind us. Then another. We stopped at the shouts and calls. Some Ethiopian in the excitement had fired at the truck behind us and had shot the French journalist, George Goyon, through the leg just above the knee. Our interpreter was shot in the arm, the bullet smashing the bone. Subsequently the unfortunate chap died.

It was difficult to blame the people. We were white men. They had just seen their fellows blown up, mangled, torn and killed by other whites. They had seen their streets go up, their houses burned and their animals slain. But I could not in my heart find blame for them. I was too ashamed at that moment of being white and of thinking of other white men up in the skies who had just rained death upon what to all intents and purposes was a defenseless town to point a finger at the poor Ethiopians about me.

We rushed Goyon back to the Mission and then I went to work in the Red Cross dressing tent. The doctors were overwhelmed with wounded. Hour after hour we worked. Men and women and children with torn faces, smashed limbs. Children blinded by incendiary bombs, their eyes gone and their poor pinched faces pitted and seared by burning chemical. Women with their breasts torn away by shell splinters. One poor white haired old woman died in my arms on the table while her two smashed and torn legs were being amputated. There was no one to give chloroform, so I did the work, having had experience in the hospitals along far northern Labrador.

But as I worked, I wondered what was the reason for this slaughter, why so



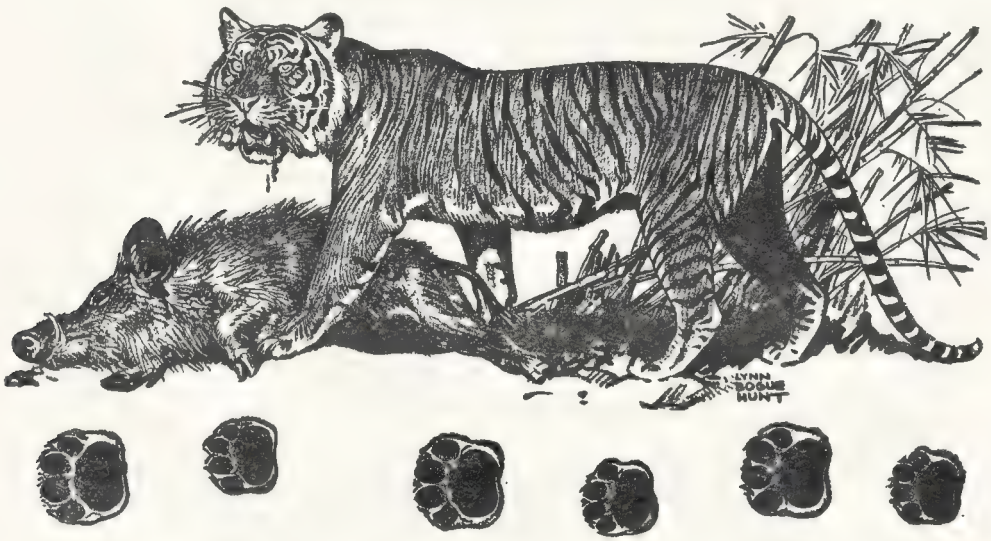
This advertisement is not intended to offer alcoholic beverages for sale or delivery in any state or community where the advertising, sale, or use thereof is unlawful.

many people whose only crime is being uneducated and harmless, and who lived in a country which another and more powerful nation coveted, should be so terribly hurt. And I could find no reason.

That night, after we had dressed and cared for over one hundred and eleven wounded in the one tent in which I worked, Lorenzo Taezas, advisor to His Majesty the Emperor and his representative with the press, came to the Mission compound and showed us a declaration which had been tossed from one of the Italian planes in a bottle. It read as follows. "Hurrah for Italy. Hurray for Duce. Hurray for the King. We carry the tricolor of the Lictors of Facism, the sign of the civilization of Rome. We salute you, Haile Selassie. Did your umbrella do you any good today? How did you like our biscuits?"

As Lorenzo read us the paper, his dark face lit fitfully by the leaping flames of a camp-fire, I thought of all the wounded I had helped to care for. I looked at my hands, covered darkly with the stain of iodine from dressings. I thought of the dead mother I had seen and the little children lying without their heads. "The sign of the civilization of Rome." "The Lictors of Facism."

I turned my head away so that Lorenzo might not see the shame in my eyes. White men had issued that boast. White men had committed the havoc about us. I was white.



THE BENGAL ASSASSIN

CONTRARY to general belief, the tiger exceeds the lion in size, power and ruthlessness. It is a much more wicked antagonist to man and animal life alike, being much more crafty and savage.

The tiger is very destructive in its range, the elephant and the one-horned rhinoceros probably being the only creatures exempt. Its propensity to carry off human beings as food is only too well known.

Truly, the hunter who stalks and kills his tiger afoot—that man has probably achieved the utmost as a big game sportsman.

—LYNN BOGUE HUNT.

"THEY'VE SHOT JUG MURPHY..."

By S. Omar Barker

FROM the twisted way the dead man's body lay on the oil-smeared concrete directly in front of the tarnished little cash register, you could see that he had tried, tried desperately, to get up after he fell. Bennett, the chinless, hollow chested owner of the Wayside Filling Station, saw at once, when he returned. He saw the blood-smeared finger marks and unbelievable nail scratches on hard wall plaster where the shot man had tried to pull himself up. He saw one wornout, rundown bootheel still gouging into a rough spot, striving futilely for footing in the floor cement. He saw a tire wrench lying not a foot from the dead man's hand, instead of beside the cash register where he had left it.

He saw the shabby little man's face, weather brown and wrinkled as old leather, and he read the expression that had lingered on it even beyond the last moment of life. Fear was not in it, nor pain, nor panic. What it was—there was no mistaking the set of those grizzly bristled lips between gooseberry nose and cleft, dried-apple chin—what it was, it was defiance.

All this the station owner saw, besides the looted cash register, and somehow, without even knowing it himself, he began to cry. Not because the dead man was father, brother or even close friend to him; but because in all these signs he could see the picture of this shabby, watery-eyed little old bum standing fast to defend the property left momentarily in his charge; facing the robber's gun unafraid, refusing to step aside or put up his hands, but reaching instead for the only possible weapon in sight—the

tire tool that now lay so near the gnarled brown knuckles of his dead hand; challenging certain death for the plain, simple reason that he had been asked to watch the filling station a few minutes while the owner was out. A small, scrawny old down-and-outer, struggling to get up and fight, even after two lead slugs had lodged death in his creaky body. Courage, death, in futile defense of the less than twenty dollars now gone from the ransacked register.

The wayside station's owner stifled a racking cough as he bent over him. He spoke almost in a whimper:

"Pardner, you never needed to do it! Whyn't you let 'im take it? God, I would of myself!"

There was no one to hear and answer for old Jug Murphy now. The wide home range of his riding days lay eastward more than half a thousand miles as the crow flies from this lunger's shabby station on a modern, black-paved highway across Arizona.

White to the gills, shaky, Bennett ran outside, looked, listened, saw nothing, heard nothing; then he cranked up his flivver and scurried down the westward road for help.

EASTWARD in the gathering dusk a stolen roadster swung abruptly southward on a side road off the main highway. The pasty faced young man beside the driver cursed whiningly.

"Lookit, Split," he repeated for the dozenth time, "you gotta go bump a guy for eighteen bucks! Ain't we in a spot now? Ain't—"

"Shut up! W'at of it?" The driver's voice, peculiarly nasal, sidled harshly from the right corner of his ill formed mouth. "Ain't no dead guy gonna put the finger on us, Charley, like he might if I hadn't bumped him. Nobody seen it, did they? Nobody tailin' us. We ain't met nobody—yet. How the hell they gonna hang anything on us—I'm askin' yuh? Not a chance, dope. What we gotta do, we gotta ditch this hot bus you grabbed in L. A. purty soon. After that—first we lay low a day or two in this next burg, an' in a week we're safe in Chi, see!"

The pasty face called Charley grunted.

"But you didn't hafta bump this guy, Split! God, you didn't hafta—"

Split's queer nasal chuckle interrupted him.

"Listen, Charley, I ain't so dumb, see! This old guy's settin' in there gazin' kinda dopey at a bottle he's just emptied; kinda wipin' his lips. Looks like he ain't had a shave for a week. So I dope it right off that he ain't the boss—just an ol' bum, see! So first I asks him: 'Where's the boss, George?' 'Why, down the road a piece, after milk,' he says. 'Be back in 'bout fifteen minutes. Anything I kin do fer ye?' 'Yeah,' I says, showin' the rod. 'Put 'em up!'

"But he don't put 'em up. He reaches for the tire wrench—an' I let 'im have it. Why not? Cripes, who's gonna raise a fever over an ol' punk like that gettin' bumped way out here in the sticks? Pipe down an' quit gripin'! Don't be a dope, Charley!"

In some degree Split's callous calculation was right. The wayside station's owner was a health-seeker, a sick man, and his flivver in little better shape than himself. Less than halfway to the nearest telephone it coughed to a stop and stayed there. Bennett stood in the highway and tried to flag down every car that passed; but motorists have learned to be wary of holdups along isolated stretches of western highway, especially after dark, and it was hours before one stopped and took Bennett's message. It was still more hours until a deputy sheriff arrived from the nearest county seat, a good sized town some sixty miles westward.

He was a good man, young, rugged, efficient, ready to do his duty, but as good as helpless for lack of clues to go

on. You can't track a murderer on modern pavement like you could in the old days on dusty trails.

One thing they did discover that Bennett had not noticed the evening before in his agonized excitement: there was more to the red finger marks on the white painted wall than mere smears and scratches. Down low, close to the floor, there were crude letters, a shaky scrawl of finger writing, in blood—shaky and apparently crazy; for what they managed to spell out without understanding it was this: "Cant whissl."

There was a smeared drag down from the last "l" to the floor where Jug Murphy's dying hand had fallen.

"Poor old devil," said the young deputy. "Must have tried to call or whistle for help, and when he couldn't, somehow got the idea that he ought to explain why he didn't. You know his folks, Bennett? Where he's from?"

Bennett shook his head miserably, stifling a cough.

"Told me he didn't have no folks. Seems like he said he was just an old broke-down cowboy—'turned out to grass', he put it. Said they was an old friend or two offered him a job somewhere on a ranch or something in New Mexico, but he was too stove-up an'—an' drunk too much to be worth a damn to anybody any more, an' he wouldn't take charity from nobody. So he'd took his little savin's an' bought an old car and started for L.A. Thought he might get a watchman job or something in the stockyards.

"Stopped here 'bout a week ago with his old car draggin' its insides and I let him camp here while he worked on it. Cheerful old cuss—never seemed to worry him much that he couldn't seem to get it fixed; only said he'd *have* to purty soon or he'd be out of likker. No—I wouldn't say he got drunk at all. Just drank a little all the time. Helped me right smart around the station, so I never thought nothing of it when I left him to kinder watch things awhile last night—till I come back an' found him this—thisaway. Gosh, he didn't need to do it, mister! Not on my account! Just seems like—"

"I know," the young deputy nodded soberly. "Some of these old boys just seem to be built that way, that's all. God, I'd like to hang the punk that shot him, but—well, I don't see much I can work on. I'll take the body back to town and get on the wire—specially to the east, as you say there wasn't any car passed heading west while you were gone for milk. You sure you don't recall the names of any of those friends he talked about?"

Bennett shook his head.

"All he ever let out was first names and such, like 'ol' Walt' or 'ol' Whacker' or some such. But look—here's the maker's name on his boot loops—you might try notifying him. I hate to think of an ol' feller like this without even friends to claim his body."

"So do I," said the deputy. "I'll do what I can by telegraph. Let's lift him into my car. Easy, now! God, he's nothing but skin and bones, man!"

"And guts," said Bennett solemnly as they eased the body into the deputy's sedan.

"WITHOUT even any friends to claim his body," the proprietor of the Wayside Filling Station had said. . . .

In a dusty, cluttered, cowboy bootshop on a side street of Las Vegas, New Mexico, Bootmaker Larsen's leather stained left hand reached for his hat. His right clutched a yellow telegram. He did not even stop to lock the shop behind him. He walked fast for an elderly man with bow legs and a limp. He was blowing a little when he turned in through the marble front of the Stockman's Bank and Trust.

"Vere is old Valt? I got to see him, quick!"

"Mr. Satterwhite has a directors' meeting on this morning," said the clerk. "Will you come back this afternoon?"

"No," said Bootmaker Larsen, and crowded past her. He stood in the door of the directors' room, unawed by its elegance.

"Valt," he said. "I got to see you." He waved the telegram. "Dey've shot olt Jug Murphy out in Arizona!"

The iron gray man in the president's chair rose swiftly, with something of the easy, sure movement of a cowboy "steppin' on a hoss."

"Excuse me, gentlemen!"

The door closed behind him and Bootmaker Larsen. In a jiffy he reappeared, stood a brief moment in the doorway. A grim grayness lay like a shadow on his ruddy face.

"I'm sorry, boys. I reckon this business'll have to keep till next week. I expect to be pretty busy, next few days."

Out on the street Banker Satterwhite and Bootmaker Larsen stopped short in front of a lank, tobacco-stained man squatting in the sun against a pool hall window.

"Whacker," Walt Satterwhite spoke quietly but incisively—more like the old time wagon boss of the Rocking M than a town man banker, "Lars just got a wire from out in Arizona. They've shot ol' Jug Murphy."

Whacker McCorkle teetered to his feet with the quickest movement he had made in years, spitting out his cud as he rose.

"The low-bellied sons!" he said. "Who done it?"

"That's what we aim to find out. How quick can you lay your hands on a horse?"

"Quicker'n you kin bat your gotch eye, Walt! What's the powders?"

"We'll have somethin' figgered, in side of an hour. Git saddled—an' ready to ride!"

Neither Whacker McCorkle's cheap, seat-worn cotton pants, nor Bootmaker Larsen's shop-stained Levi's, nor Banker Satterwhite's well pressed tailor-made gray business suit could hide the saddle bow of three pairs of legs hurrying up the street.

"Sefen year April I make him dem last boots," Larsen was saying. "An' him still vearing dem—an' my name still on the straps, Valt. Remember the time he lost dot boot in the quicksand over on the Red and I haff to make choost vun boot vunee instead of the pair?"

Walt Satterwhite's gray eyes were gazing straight ahead. There was a grim, stiff straightness about his office-sagged shoulders now. He was remembering well enough without reminder—remembering a day out of the long gone years when a jaunty, grinning young puncher with a gooseberry nose and round-apple chin had first loped up to the Rocking M wagon and thrown his saddle on the ground; remembering how he had noticed the newcomer's lass rope was broken, his saddle gear all out of whack, his horse's ribs too bloody and spur scratched to belong to a white man, one of his own hands bruised and knuckle busted, his gun holster empty, the smell of a broken whisky flask about his pocket. How he, the young wagon boss who prided himself on the ship-shape order of all gear and horseflesh at his wagon, had seen these things and refused Jug Murphy a job—and the next day sent a man after him to bring him back when he had learned that all these things were no result of carelessness nor drunkenness, but simply the scars of a hand to hand encounter, unarmed, with a trio of rustlers whose doings—at that time at least—were really none of Murphy's business. And Murphy too jug-headed —or something—to explain about it.

That lost boot—he remembered it, too, and the "ten dollar hoss" Jug Murphy had somehow saved out of the sand at the risk of his own life, after Slim

Billings had abandoned it. That the lost boot—or his life either, for that matter —was worth more than the horse had never occured to Jughead Murphy.

Now they had shot ol' Jug, somewhere out in Arizona. . . . In his mind Ex-Wagon Boss Walt Satterwhite repeated Whacker McCorkle's comment, bitterly. Himself he cursed a little, too. Ought to have kinder looked after the old boy better, damn it, and this wouldn't have happened.

Half a block after Whacker left them to high-tail it after a horse, Larsen and Satterwhite met Deputy Sheriff Taylor. The deputy was another iron gray man, but tall and lean and lantern jawed.

"Just tried to phone you, Walt. Got a wire from out in Arizona. They've sh—"

"I know. Ol' Jug. We was just comin' to tell you, before we answer Larsen's wire. Your telegram give you any idee, Luke?"

"Here it is."

The yellow paper that Deputy Taylor handed over was crumpled, as if the fingers of a strong fist had closed on it involuntarily, gripping hard. The hand that offered it was shaky. Walt Satterwhite took it in steady fingers and read it.

MAN WHO GAVE NAME AS JUG MURPHY MURDERED WAYSIDE FILLING STATION NEAR HERE BY PARTY OR PARTIES UNKNOWN STOP POSSIBLE KILLER IS HEADING EAST IN STOLEN TAN CHEV COUPE LICENSE 16 839 L A CAL STOP NO OTHER CLUE STOP MURPHY SHOT WHILE WATCHING STATION FOR FRIEND APPARENTLY TRIED TO PREVENT ROBBERY OF SAME STOP SCRAWLED WORDS QUOTE CANT WHISSL UNQUOTE IN BLOOD ON WALL BEFORE HE DIED STOP HOLD ANY SUSPICIOUS CHARACTERS AND NOTIFY THIS OFFICE.

Walt Satterwhite's gray eyes met the gaze of Deputy Taylor's weathered brown ones keenly; then both of them looked questioningly into Bootmaker Larsen's squinty blue ones. For a brief moment no word passed between them, yet in their silence was a gleam of mutual understanding.

"Can't vissel, eh?" Bootmaker Larsen almost chuckled.

Something like a grim, dry grin parted Walt Satterwhite's lips.

"By God, boys," he said. "If he's headin' east we're goin' to git him!"

Within that hour a certain Arizona sheriff's office received a wire from Walt Satterwhite with a good strong jolt of surprise in various parts of its contents. Not the least astonishing part was the Las Vegas banker's instructions concerning the body of the "poor old feller who had no friends":

. . . . RUSH BODY EXPRESS BEST OF CARE BEST UNDERTAKER EMBALM TO KEEP AS LONG AS POSSIBLE STOP SPARE NO EXPENSE BUT IN SAME CLOTHING AND DO NOT SHAVE FACE THIS IS IMPORTANT STOP WILL GET MURDERER OR BUST GUT TRYING STOP AM WIRING FUNDS. . . .

UP, up and up into the mountains northwest of Las Vegas, pushing his horse with spur and quirt, even his "chaw-"chawin'" forgotten now, rode the man called Whacker McCorkle, while that same hour still had half its round to go. He caught Slim Billings and his outfit late-nooning at the wagon in the Canada Alamosa.

"They've shot ol' Jug, Slim, out in Arizona!" Without even the delay of a preliminary greeting Whacker broke the news, and quickly, briefly, the swift, hard details of old Walt Satterwhite's plan.

Slim Billings, grizzly-whiskered, unkempt, gray but hardy looking, wasted no words as he turned to his hands.

"Boys, you didn't know Jug Murphy,

maybe, but I swum the river with him many a time plumb back before who laid the chunk. That ol' boy was a cowhand—an' they've shot 'im! We'll drop the herd right here. Ol' Walt's givin' the powders. They's four of us—an' all got guns! Let's go!"

Whacker McCorkle saddled a fresh horse. The dust of him rose in a thin brown fog northeastward. At a humble, neat little adobe in the midst of a cornfield on the Mora he drew rein, shouted, and reined around to crash through the corn rows to the man who answered.

The squatty, plump cheeked Mexican farmer waddled, bow-legged, to meet him, angry at this trompling of his clean rowed corn patch. But his reproaches remained unsaid.

"They've kilt ol' Jug Murphy, Chopo. . . . Walt sends the word . . . . You got a horse? . . . Or a car? *Bueno!* . . . Now listen . . . . Yourn's the road from Taos where it crosses the mountain . . . ."

From a goat horn rack in his little hut Chopo Pete Encinias took down a huge, ancient .45 that he had not shot for twenty years. Wife, children, grandchildren crowded wonderingly around him.

"That Jog," he said, and his voice was both grim and husky as he spoke unconsciously in the English he had learned at cowcamps. "Was wan time the wil' bonch steal me the *remuda* up on the Cimarron—that Jog, by God, he wheep 'um *heem*self, an' breeng it back! They keel me the frand, eh, thees *chivo!* Gootbye, *queridos!* I go!"

The dead-gallop dust of Whacker McCorkle's swift riding on was still in the air when he left.

Back in Las Vegas, Larsen's bootshop stood deserted, a waxed end drawn on a seam, sharp awl lying where he had dropped it; and at the Stockman's Bank customers with important business snorted and complained in vain that they could not see the president.

Bootmaker Larsen and Deputy Luke Taylor were already out on the highway, and Walt Satterwhite, sweating like a summer cowhand, worked swiftly with long distance telephone and with telegraph:

"Get me Jim Gray at Pecos, Texas, please . . . . Bust through as quick as you can, Central, for Hank—Henry F., that is— Livingston at Amarillo . . . . Hello . . . . Santa Rosa? . . . Not in town? No phone? Then send a messenger . . . . Yes, with this message: 'Jug Murphy shot in Arizona. . . .'" And the rest of it in swift, clear detail, no wasted words.

And it came about that the dust of swift going cars, of hard spurred horses began to rise from road and trail, from foothill, mountain and plain all the way from Cheyenne south and south across Colorado, New Mexico, down a wide swath of oldtime cattle range even unto the sand and mesquite of Langtry, Texas, where once old Judge Roy Bean had dealt hard law "west of the Pecos and south to the Rio Grande."

From his thick carpeted office in Las Vegas, Wagon Boss Walt Satterwhite was issuing his "powders" to scattered scores of men of the saddle, with not one iota of legal authority to compel their obedience—and needing none beyond the unvarying burden of each call, each wire, each spur-swift messenger's grim-spoken words: "They've shot ol' Jug Murphy out in Arizona. . . ."

Out under the Cap Rock east of Horsehead Crossing a sweat-grimed cowboy threw down his branding iron, redhot, and reached for horse and rope and gun. In the Denver Stockyards a grizzled commission house salesman turned the vending of a dozen carloads of fine fat cattle over to an assistant and rummaged dusty desk drawers for a long forgotten .45.

South of Yeso a lone windmill went on creaking ungreased while its owner climbed quickly down to saddle a fresh horse and buckle on his gun. At Roswell

well-to-do retired cattlemen chocked bootheels down from pleasant hotel veranda railings with clear, hard gleams in eyes long since grown lowlidded and drowsy with the pipesmoke of ease and reminiscence.

At Tatum a young high school algebra teacher dismissed his classes—and two of his ranch-raised pupils joined him when he told them why. They had never heard of Jug Murphy, but the young teacher's father, long since dead, had gone up the trail with him in a day when friendship bred thriftily out of hardships shared.

But it was from ranch and range men answered more than anywhere else, and not alone the oldsters. The fellowship of saddlemen goes deeper and farther than mere personal friendship and acquaintance.

There was no wordy parleying, no posse-ing to and fro. Old Walt had "done planned it out." His messages told them what to do in language brief and plain and simple, and no cowboy questioned that he had figured old Jug Murphy's last scrawled message aright.

THERE appeared, that day and the next, on almost every motor road and highway across the long strip down from southern Wyoming to Mexico's sandy Border, a blockade the like of which the traveling public had never seen before, nor is like to see again.

No car, no truck, no bus too small, too large, too old, too new, too fast, too slow, but that the range men's barrier stopped it, by day or night. Lass ropes stretched across the road; booted men in pairs and threes and fours, sometimes one alone, stood forth in the face of speeding cars to flag them down. Some wore stars of the law to gleam in the dazzle of headlights; some had rigged big signs to hold aloft reading "Officers Stop for Search" or some equivalent; some set out red lanterns by night, red flags by day; and some just simply got out there and stopped them.

"Kindly excuse us, mister. We got to look you over. . . . Now never mind to git wrothy, this ain't no hold-up. . . . Sorry if you scorched them tires, mister, but we're lookin' for a feller, yeah, a murderer. . . . No, ain't ary such in this car, Zeb. Let him drive on. . . . Wup, there! I wouldn't reach for no gun, mister. This here hold-up's the law. . . . Ain't goin' to harm nobody except the feller we're lookin' fer. . . . Yup, I know these busses runs on schedule, Skinny, but first we got to look over your passengers. . . . Yeah, they may stop you again somewheres up the line. Quite a few out on this work, mister. You better jest make up your mind to let 'em look you over. . . ."

Quiet, courteous, joking a little with those motorists who took it goodhumoredly, but grim and purposeful too, and keen eyed and deliberate, hundreds of sun-wrinkled range men of yesterday and of today stopped and searched the traffic, peering close at each face.

The morning of the second day Walt Satterwhite, bleary eyed from a sleepless night during half of which he had checked eastbound traffic into Vegas himself, read a telegram from the young deputy out in Arizona. It said that the stolen tan coupé under suspicion had been found abandoned and nothing to show where its occupant or occupants had gone. Walt's lips tightened a little. Suppose the murderer had headed back west again? Arizona officers were cooperating, but naturally with no such wide-flung net as this. Or suppose the murderer had decided to lie low and not come on through? Your net catches no fish that lurk in hiding under the bank. Suppose, even, that his own hunch had been all wrong?

Old Walt recalled a time when Jug Murphy had stayed three days and nights with a pick-up of blizzard-driven cattle, without more food than the

scant squirtings of milk he could get from roping wild, juiceless cows, until the outfit's riders had found him.

Patience. . . .

The second night Brite Bagley took a scared, angry man out of a car at Fort Sumner and brought him, untold as to the reason, on a wild, hell-pounding ride through rain and mud on up to Las Vegas.

The man had alternately pled, cursed, wept, resisted with his fists and sworn to high heaven in his indistinct nasal voice that he'd have Brite in jail for life for this outrage; but Brite had brought him in anyhow. Then, after an hour of strange examination, they turned him loose.

"Brother," Brite Bagley told him then, "if some son of a son ever murders a friend of yours, you let me know an' I'll help ketch him for you. But don't go bustin' your cinches over this. I never picked up a stray yet but what I shoved it back where I found it when I seen my mistake. Git in the car. I'm takin' you back to Fort Sumner quicker than we come!"

"Here," broke in Walt Satterwhite. He shoved a folded fifty dollar bill into the dazed man's hand. "We don't aim to injure nobody that's innocent, boy. But when there's a wolf to git, ary dog with long hair's liable to git shot at. I wouldn't try makin' Brite no trouble if I was you."

The third day in the morning Whacker McCorkle rode in, a leather skinned skeleton on a fagged out horse. He spurred feebly out to where Walt Satterwhite, red-eyed, his neat gray suit baggy and dust grimed, was stopping the inbound traffic at the lower bridge.

"Gimme a chaw, Walt," he said, "an' I'll spell you awhiles you go git some sleep. Don't need none m'self. Ain't shet an eye in so long, damned if I ain't forgot how!"

At midafternoon that day both Walt Satterwhite and Whacker McCorkle were still on duty.

Passengers on the big Greyhound bus stared, startled but curious, at the spectacle of this ragged, gawky Ichabod of a man and a rumpled looking banker with a gun sagging from his hip climbing aboard the bus.

Slowly the two walked down the aisle under the impatient eye of the driver. Before the third seat from the rear they stopped. They stood a moment silent, looking at the passenger who stared boldly back up at them. Still silent, they exchanged glances. McCorkle shifted his cud, nodded.

"Mister," said Satterwhite very quietly, "will you please to come with us?"

"Yeah? W'at for? 'At's what I wanta know—what for?"

He got no answer but the straight gaze of two pairs of bleary but steady, searching eyes, and the silent grip of steel-trap fingers on his arm.

"Jeez, you guys!" the peculiarly nasal voice spoke conciliatingly now. "W'at's the big idear?"

No answer. But he went along, the hard grip of a rope-toughened hand on either arm.

"You can drive on now," Walt said to the bus driver as they climbed out. "Sorry to have bothered you."

Bank President Satterwhite's big new sedan stood by the side of the road. Walt honked the horn. Deputy Taylor and another man in cowboy dress rose promptly from nearby bedrolls.

"Your guard a while, boys," Walt's voice showed the slightest of tremors through its matter of fact calm. He opened the right hand front door of the sedan. "Git in!"

"But jeez, you guys! You ain't got no rights to—"

Whacker McCorkle's long thumb prodded him in the back. He got in.

There are a lot of filling stations in and around a town the size of Las Vegas. Unhurriedly, one by one, Walt Satter-

white drove to them all. They rode in dead silence except for the soft squishy sound of McCorkle chewing tobacco in the back seat, and the occasional frantic outbursts of their prisoner protesting their right to take him thus. At each filling station they stopped awhile. Just stopped and sat in silence. Finally they drove out to a wayside station beyond the town. There is something strangely similar about all these wayside stations.

"Get out," said Satterwhite. White-faced, cowed, the man obeyed. "Step inside there, please."

The station attendant stepped away from the door. The prisoner, with his two silent guards close behind him, stepped inside.

Over beyond the cash register, life-like, somehow achingly pitiful, lay the body of Jug Murphy in an open coffin. A stubble of salty gray whiskers—and that same look of courage, of defiance to danger—were upon his weather rugged, roundish face. His clothes were the grimy clothes of a man who has been working under an automobile. His boots, still on, were those of a cowboy who always wears the best of hand made foot gear, worn though they be. The drawer of the little tarnished cash register stood open.

Old Walt Satterwhite's voice spoke softly, yet deep in it a hardness harder than steel, a grimness grimmer than death:

"Looks purty much the same as when you shot him, don't he?"

With a snarl, part fury, part terror, part the frantic yelp of a trapped wolf, the man from the bus, his queer mouth distorted, whirled, reaching a hand for his armpit.

But it was no use. Years in a swivel chair had not destroyed the strength of Walt Satterwhite's years in the saddle. In a flash he had the man's gun from its armpit holster.

"It's a .38," he said softly. "Same as both the bullets."

"Jug," Whacker McCorkle poked his head solemnly in at the door. "I reckon they kin put you to bed now. It looks like ol' Walt has got 'im."

WHEN they turned the dazed, nerve-shattered, confessed murderer of Jug Murphy over to Arizona authorities the next day, Whacker McCorkle was still wistfully hanging around with a rope.

"We're countin' on your Arizona courts to see this murderer gets justice!" Walt Satterwhite's tired eyes met those of the Arizona deputy squarely. "If you let him get away—"

"He won't get away! God man, I'm still in a daze how you managed to get him, without anything more definite to go on. I—"

"Jug Murphy was always purty definite, son. He knowed there'd be some of us wouldn't want to see his murderer git away. Maybe he couldn't spell so good, but he was hell on stayin' with his fights to the end. He had to use his own blood to write it, but he got it wrote. He knowed there'd be some ol' cowboy recollect that's what him—and most ever' other old cowhand—always called a man with a hare-lip—a 'can't whistle'. Well, all we had to do was turn the country inside out, till we picked up a hare-lipped hombre that'd bust the corral when we showed him the man he'd murdered—the ol' down-an'-outer without no friends, the way he reckoned it—layin' there so natural—way off here hundreds of miles from where he done it. Ol' cowboys generally have a few friends, Mister Deputy."

"A few!" The young deputy spoke fervently, husky voiced at this one clear glimpse into a fellowship of the past that he had been born too late to share.

"Friends," old Walt Satterwhite spoke soberly again, "who'll still have a rope handy when the time comes—if your judge and jury don't stand up 'to the taw line!"

THE TROUBLE TWINS

By James Stevens

MR. J. P. McGOWL, logging superintendent of the Lemolo Timber Company, was despondently studying a wall map of the woods in his charge when trouble broke into his office. It was, this incident, the climax of an unhappy hour for Mr. McGowl. On his desk was scattered the morning mail, all bad news, from the report of the Camp Three failure to clear right-of-way for a new logging spur through Hemlock Canyon, to a letter from the manager, threatening to remove him from office. This letter was about the Hemlock Canyon job too. Hemlock Canyon, marked by an innocent red squiggle on the timber map, was Mr. McGowl's private and particular road to hell.

His dismal musings were interrupted by the violent opening of the office door, and the stamping of spiked boots. As he turned, the door banged. Two men stood against it, staring at the superintendent. And he gaped at them in speechless wonder.

The two were loggers, rough-geared and hard-used, as alike as two peas and not much bigger. Such was Mr. McGowl's first thought. Sandy hair bristled from under each battered hat, four blue eyes regarded McGowl from identical patches of freckles. They were mites of men, hardly inching over five feet in their calked boots, and perhaps hefting a hundred and twenty apiece in their ragged mackinaws and patched tin

pants. There was but one marked difference between them, a contrast of expression. This appeared when the face of one was sunned by a smile as sweet and innocent as a seraph's. The other looked at McGowl with a hellion's leer.

"I hope you'll excuse us kindly, Mr. McGowl," said the angel-looker, moving on from the door, "but we heard they was a timber-fallin' job open, and we run so hard to get it afore—"

His voice, a soft, shy, appealing drawl stopped. A roar of rage rasped through the door panels. With a violent swing the door opened, and a mackinawed giant with a nickel badge on his chest and fire in his eye lurched into the office. He was Bat Buckley, the deputy sheriff who enforced the law in the little tidewater timber town. As he sighted the two midget loggers he roared again, like a bear with toothache.

The two separated, the angel-looker keeping in front of the officer, the hellion-looker circling to his rear.

"Hey, you men!" boomed Mr. McGowl, remembering his dignity. "What the hell is the meanin' of this damn' instrusion?"

Deputy Buckley hauled up, and gulped apologetically.

"I oughtn't to busted in so rambunctious, Mr. McGowl," he said, "but them warts has got my mad up. Mrs. Buckley went and fixed 'em a prime breakfast, and when I took it to 'em the ongrateful runts busted outer jail."

McGowl's eyes again bugged with astonishment.

"How'd they do that?" he demanded. "Why, you'd make five of 'em!"

"This here one looks so dahgunned innocent I got off of my guard." Buckley glowered at the one before him. "He twisted the top from the pepper box and flung the pepper in my eyes. And—"

"Never mind. What was they in for?"

"They ganged up on Big Mouth Hogan in the Bluebell Saloon last night and beat hell outer him." Buckley paused, to let that sink in, then went on. "They'd come here to hide out from the law at Mud Bay. Big Mouth knowed about 'em up there, and he was tellin' me they was called the Trouble Twins, and how it fits 'em to a T. Horn is the name. This one butter wouldn't melt in his mouth is Sunny Horn, t'other is Smoky."

"Git down to cases," ordered McGowl.

"Well, in Mud Bay they licked a bunch of them Bulgarian tideflat squatters—seven of 'em. They was—"

"Seven of them *mean* Bulgarians?" McGowl asked incredulously.

"Yes, sir, the mean ones, them that et the raw shark meat, or brag they did. Well, Big Mouth was tellin' me about the Trouble Twins, and they got onto it, and horsed him some way into the back room of the Bluebell and beat him up. I don't know how, for Big Mouth ain't able to talk yet, him gettin' eleven of his teeth kicked in."

"I can explain it, if you'll kindly please to listen," said Sunny Horn, in gentle appeal. "We never meant anybody any harm. It's only we can be pushed jest so far, and then the worms in us, as you might say, goes and turns. All we want is a job. A timber-fallin' job. That's what Smoky and me are—timber-fallers. We heard Mr. McGowl had a job open, and we want to ask for it polite. That's all."

The superintendent automatically shook his head. These times there were ten men dogfighting for every job in the woods.

"You boys better go back peaceable to jail," he said paternally. "You can eat there anyhow, and Mrs. Buckley's cookin' is prime."

That was enough for Deputy Buckley. He fetched out handcuffs and advanced on Sunny Horn.

Sunny Horn, still smiling seraphically, suddenly crouched and lunged, his head low. In the same instant Smoky dove

to his hands and knees behind the giant deputy. Another second, and Sunny Horn's head struck Buckley an inch above the belt, with a meaty thud. Buckley took a crashing back dive over Smoky Horn's haunches. Sunny came on, with the leap of a logger working round stuff in white water. He lit with both calked boots plowing the deputy's bottom ribs. Buckley went limp with a "whish" like the exhaust of a locomotive.

So much in the click of seconds. In another flash the amazing little men were heeling through the door. Mr. McGowl stood petrified. Then a swift beat of running feet pulled his gaze to a window. The Trouble Twins had ditched out the back way and were streaking through the morning drizzle for a line of railroad that curved into the murk of a misty gorge.

Mr. McGowl came alive, and swung over to the telephone. He rang Camp Three, with the simple intention of warning the timekeeper to keep a lookout for the two quarter-sized loggers. It was all mountain wilderness toward Three, and the Trouble Twins would have to head on to camp or turn back to town. But, as he waited for an answer to his ring, Mr. McGowl remembered a few things. The letter from the chief, the red squiggle on the map, the work the little Horns had done on the mean Bulgarians, Big Mouth Hogan and Bat Buckley. They were timber-fallers.

"McGowl speakin'," said the super, in his best executive voice. "Is this you, Inky? All right, listen. There's a couple timber-fallers just started afoot your way. Ought to be there couple hours or so. Send word to the push to watch for 'em and grab 'em. . . . Yeh, Hemlock Canyon. They'll work it, or come back here to jail. Huh? Hell, they're too tough. Now, listen, here's how they look. . . . Yes, I'm sober, you ape. . . ."

CAMP THREE was a railroad layout, with bunk cars anchored on blind sidings. Some three hundred yards on from camp the main line crossed a high trestle over Hemlock Canyon. Near the campward end of the trestle a spur track switched from the logging railroad, thrusting rusty rails up the canyon's flank. They ended abruptly at a narrow stand of timber.

The stand was on a flat shelf of the canyon's granite wall some fifty feet above the brawling creek, another sheer bluff lifting on from the treetops. Far up the canyon, mountains rose darkly in the winter drizzle, the high slopes merging with gray cloud packs.

Three men who had come from camp halted at the switchback. Two were the Trouble Twins, Sunny and Smoky Horn. The other was Gil Dugger, the Camp Three push. The twins were loaded down with timber-fallers' gear—a crosscut saw, double-bitted axes, springboards, wedges, mauls, and a jug of kerosene. Dugger, a long-coupled individual with a wolf-trap face and eyes like a pair of black knots, wore a cartridge belt and hog-legged gun under his mackinaw.

"There's yer job, runts," Dugger said. He chewed out words like iron filings. "All you got to do is go to it, and don't try to skin out." He started on for the trestle and the logging works beyond.

"Excuse me kindly," Sunny Horn called after him, "but ain't you goin' to take us up and set us in, or nothin' like that?"

Gil Dugger turned deliberately around, and stood with his hands parting the flaps of his mackinaw, so that the gun butt bulged out.

"I ain't botherin' with you two runts no way, onless you try to skin out," Dugger said. He spat tobacco juice hard at a rail. It struck with a sort of bang. "I'm only carryin' out the bull's orders. You're to fall that bench timber, or I'm to take you back to jail, and if you

anyway make me mad I'll most likely shoot the pants offen you. I don't like to be bothered. You go to work, and don't bother me. Understand that?"

"Oh, yes, sir," Sunny answered, too meekly.

Mr. Dugger whacked the rail with another shot from his steel-trap mouth, heeled about, and went. The two little loggers looked moodily at each other, amid their loads of falling gear.

"This job smells peculiar," Sunny said. "I'd even say skunky."

"Yep," Smoky said resignedly. "Trouble ag'in."

He seldom spoke to anybody but his twin. His voice was like his looks, snarly and tough. Actually Smoky was the more peaceable of the pair. All he wanted in life was to work and be let alone. It was a forlorn hope these times for a little man on the timber coast where big burlies were the rule.

Sunny didn't mind so much. He liked to rove around and raise hell. Sunny had imagination. Smoky was proud of that and always helped Sunny have his way. There had never yet been a cross word between them.

"I never before see a loggin' push packin' a gun," Sunny said. "He's so outrageous mean he must have been hired jest because he is. But I guess it's go on with this here job, or go back to jail."

"That's right," Smoky agreed. "For me, I'll choose work. It ain't that I mind jails so much. Only you and me always get into 'em in a honest way, and then we're throwed in anyhow with them who didn't get in honest. I don't like the company in jails, that's my main objection to 'em."

"You do figger things out," Sunny said admiringly. "It's a fact, jails is too damn' democratic. Well, let's get goin'."

They moved off as one man, between the rusty rails of the stub track. Silently they slogged on under their loads, their attention fixed on the bench of timber ahead. As they reached the end of the track they could see through the underbrush. A number of trees were already down. For a hundred-odd feet hemlock, fir and cedar stumps jutted through the bush and among prone trunks and bough masses. The stumps were considerably weathered. The twins plowed on for the standing trees. Suddenly they hauled up.

Before them lay a spread of shattered limbs and the split trunk of a cedar, larger than the average. The cedar's bole was not only split but it was broken crosswise at the bough-spread. The jagged ends of the break lay in the shape of a V, framing a ragged hole in the forest earth of the canyon bench.

The Trouble Twins eyed that torn gap in the earth. Then with a grim glance at each other, they moved silently on. They passed four other shattered, broken trees in the down timber, and at each there was a hole that looked as if a giant hand had gouged it out.

"How you feelin', bud?" Sunny said, as they pulled up.

"Kinder like that fly in old lady Spider's parlor." Smoky answered. "But I still don't like the company you got to keep in jail. Let's set in."

Sunny nodded agreement and they unshouldered their gear. No more was said. Big chips were soon busting out of a hemlock's gray-black bole, from the ringing bite of five-pound ax blades. Smoky, chopping with a left swing, set the pace. Both little men were loggers with the bark on, but Smoky always took the lead at work, as Sunny took it when there was fighting trouble.

A deep notch, slick-hewn, gaped in the three-foot bole of the hemlock, toward the down timber, Still silent, the two fallers swung around the tree, flipped up a crosscut saw, spraddled, crouched, and pulled teeth and rakers into the bark with swinging arm-strokes. They sawed into heartwood, then paused to maul wedges into the kerf, and

whipped the long saw on again until an explosive crack signaled the break. They pulled the saw and again drove wedges. As the bough masses plunged and crashed the fallers ducked for cover, behind nearby trees. The crash faded in dull echoes.

Sunny and Smoky Horn regarded each other with grins that were somewhat strained.

"I somehow expected hell to bust loose," Sunny confessed sheepishly. "This job is so blamed queer, all in all, it's got me fitty as an old woman."

"It bothers me, too," Smoky said. "But I wouldn't like to back out on it, after us bein' like bums and ever'body pushin' us around for so long. I'd almost forgot how good it feels to work at your natural job."

Sunny said no more. Work was just work to him, but he knew how Smoky felt about it. He vowed to himself that somehow they'd lick this job and keep it through the winter. They picked up their falling gear and started on another tree.

AS THE afternoon wore on the cloud packs drifted steadily up from the timber coast, the gray drizzle fell endlessly in the canyon. Tree after tree toppled from the bite of the saw, lining out in even ranks from axed undercuts. Again and again the crash of bough masses thundered in the wet wind.

Twilight clouded the drizzle. And trouble, having yielded the little Horn men a breathing spell, once more loomed on their trail.

It came in the shape of a large, foreign-looking man, whose face was fairly hidden in a black bush of beard and whose left arm carelessly cradled a repeating rifle.

"Don't touch dot tree," the stranger rumbled through his whiskers. "No dot one. Me no like see."

Sunny gave Smoky the high-sign for trouble and moved slowly to meet the bush-faced man, smiling his most innocent as he did. The smile was considerably unreal. Sunny was tired from honest labor. But he held the smile, while Smoky cat-footed around tree, and cut back behind Bush Face.

"Would you kindly please to explain, mister?" Sunny softly drawled. "Just what is it you don't like to see?"

"Blow up, no dot," rumbled the whiskers. "Men, I no give da damn. Boys, no like see. Don' touch dot tree. Boom! Pa-fooey!"

That last sounded in an explosive roar. With it Bush Face made a motion with his right hand that was eloquently expressive of somebody being taken violently apart. He pointed toward the fir boughs with the rifle barrel. It was a prime moment for Sunny's charge. Smoky was creeping into position. But the little fighting man held back.

It was well for Sunny Horn that his kinder nature prevailed, for in his moment of hesitation a gunshot banged from above them, a button popped from Bush Face's mackinaw, and lead whacked a tree just beyond him. With a hoarse yell, the man leaped around in his tracks, and plunged for deep timber. Smoky was in his path. The little logger dropped. Bush Face floundered over him, took a spread-eagle sprawl in the mud, and heaved upward and on as four more shots whanged through the woods. Smoky uncoiled and came up with the man's rifle. The shooting was over.

Peering up in the dimming light, Sunny Horn saw Gil Dugger straddling a windfall on the rim of the high bluff.

"You runts git along to camp," the push bawled down. "Mr. McGowl come up on the loggin' train and wants to know how you're doin'. I don't keer to see you gassin' with strangers."

"Yes, sir, thank you kindly," Sunny called back. He was in plain view of Dugger, so he did not look around as

he said softly to Smoky, "Stash that there rifle. Circle back so's Dugger'll think you was behind the big fir all the time." He studied the tree with seeming casualness as he walked over to the axes and saws, his gaze ranging some weathered scars in the shaggy bark. "I begin to savvy some," he said, as Smoky joined him. "Looks like we've been put upon even more'n we thought. Bud, I begin to feel fightin' mad."

The fighting twin explained what he thought he savvied, as they tramped down for the stub track. He did not stop at any one of the shattered down trees, for Dugger was still in sight, but at two of them he indicated long gouges in the bark that resembled the scars on the standing Douglas fir.

As they reached the rails of the stub the quitting whistles of the donkey engines shrilled through the twilight. The Trouble Twins hunched on for the camp.

SUPERINTENDENT McGowl, of the three Lemolo camps, hugged the commissary stove. The sweat that beaded his bald head was as cold as the rain drops that pattered against the west windows. The shooting in Hemlock Canyon had set his nerves prickling on every inch of his hide. Mr. McGowl's hide was tough, but Hemlock Canyon had worn him raw.

After six months of delay in driving the new spur along the canyon wall the superintendent faced a showdown. That timbered bench had to be cleared, chunked out, graded, and spiked with steel by spring. Next spring the upper stuff must be tapped. If McGowl couldn't tap it, he'd make room for a better man. The head office had given him precisely one more week to make a better showing.

Mr. McGowl heaved a dismal sigh.

The door opened, and the Trouble Twins tramped in. There was a look about them that caused Mr. McGowl to wait for them to speak.

"There's dynamite in that bench timber," Sunny opened up. "We was no way warned about it. In fact, this here snarly wolf you got for a push gun-herded us to the job. Ain't your fault that me and Smoky ain't bein' picked up in pieces right now."

"Now, boys," said Mr. McGowl soothingly, "you've gone and swallered a pack of lies. Bunkhouse gab, like that about Paul Bunyan trimmin' his Christmas trees with dynamite sticks. Hell, you worked all afternoon, and nothin' happened. Ain't it so?"

"Well, yes," drawled Sunny softly. "Unless you'd call Dugger emptyin' his gun at a Bulgarian somethin'."

"What's that?" Mr. McGowl's easy nonchalance vanished. Sweat popped on his shiny scalp again. "A Bulgarian—did he hit him?" McGowl breathed hoarsely.

Sunny drawled, "The Bulgarian got away all right. He was tryin' to show and tell us something, but he got away afore he did."

"That's prime." The super wheezed with relief. "The party wasn't a Bulgarian. Some other kinder Hunkie, name of Bugovic. Him and his two boys own a stump ranch up the canyon," McGowl went on more assuredly. "They're the ones who started that fantod lie about the canyon bench bein' mined with dynamite—"

"Mined, huh?" Sunny interrupted. "You mean it's planted in the ground there?"

"That's how the lie goes," McGowl said. "But it's just a bluff of the Bugovics. They run cattle, and trap and hunt the mountain timber above their ranch, and they don't want it logged. I'm fed up with 'em," McGowl stated, whacking his knee with a bony fist. "They can't bluff me no more, by grab!"

"How about them shattered sticks of down timber?" Sunny demanded.

"Oh, them!" McGowl waved his hand. "Other fallers who tackled the job was so skeered by the bluff they never lined the trees down proper, and so smashed 'em over stumps and the like."

The door opened and slammed. Gil Dugger hauled up at a warning glare from the bull. The twins ignored his presence.

"You ought to told us about the dynamite in the first place," Sunny said plaintively. "We wouldn't of minded it. We eat dynamite up. Smoky here eats it raw, if it's got whisky on it."

"Is that so?" said McGowl cautiously.

"Only," Sunny Horn drawled softly on, "bein' as it's our specialty, we got to have better'n reg'lar wages for it."

"Is that so?" the super repeated. "How much better?"

"Double," said Sunny, not so softly. "And there are other items. One thing, this here ape you got for a push is to leave us strictly alone. Another, you got to fix it so's Deppity Buckley won't jug us for trompin' him, and so's we won't be jugged neither account of them Bulgarians at Mud Bay. We never hurt 'em any. All we done was to get down among their legs, like we gener'ly do in a fight, and made them fall all over. The Balgarians started it, by callin' us runts. Them's our terms, Mr. McGowl."

"You're askin' a lot." The super spoke doubtfully. "A whole heap, for a couple of run—uh—of hobo loggers who has *the law on their tail.*"

"Maybe so," Sunny drawled. "And maybe it's not a bluff about the dynamite in the bench timber. But we'll take the job and do it. We'll fall all the timber on that bench in six weeks."

"You will?" McGowl wheezed. "Even if it ain't a bluff?"

"Yes, sir," Sunny said, and added, "and I'm bettin' that the first tree we fall in the mornin' sets off a dynamite blast."

"I ain't a bettin' man," the super hedged. "But I'll tell you what I'll do. If that first tree does set off a blast, and you still want to, I'll take your terms in black and white."

"Fair enough," Sunny said, after a look at Smoky.

After a few more words of agreement the two Horn men started from the commissary. Gil Dugger still stood by the counter, looking mean. Sunny pulled up in front of him, wagging Smoky on with a sly jerk of his thumb. McGowl's yell of warning was too late. Even as it rasped, Sunny Horn's head was ramming into Gil Dugger's middle and catapulting him over Smoky's stooped shoulders. The little loggers skipped for the door as Dugger's skull whacked the floor planks. A roar from J. P. McGowl trailed them through the rainy darkness.

"Damn you, Dugger, put up that there gun!"

"How you feel, bud?" Sunny Horn said happily. "Like things was comin' our way?"

"Kinder," Smoky said. "Only, I wish I could be certain that tree will blow up like we figger it will."

THAT night in the main bunk car Smoky Horn, pursuing an idea for making a blast certain with the contract tree, got into conversation with the chunkout boss. This was no way hard to do, as The Trouble Twins were tonight the center of attention among the rugged bunkhouse crew. The chunkout boss, whose job made him a dynamiter, would be in charge of the camp's powder cache. And, as an expert, he was naturally curious to know how the midget timberfallers figured on bringing down the trees in a stretch of mined woods without being blown to flinders.

"It ain't only the blasts you need to be skeered of," he informed Smoky cheerfully. "It's what they do to timber

and limbs. And you never know when you'll be trompin' on some of the yeller hell. It must be planted all over the bench."

"Sure it's planted, are you?" Smoky said.

"I am! Hell, I seen all four of them blasts. Each time a tree hit the ground, and bam! And the Bugovics—the story grapevined from them—they'd planted the stuff, five cases of it, stole from our cache, all through the bench."

"Wasn't they arrested for it?"

"Yeh, but the company couldn't make it stick. So Gil Dugger was hired and sent up here as push. Him and the Bugovics shower down on each other whenever they meet up. Even if you don't get blowed up," the chunkout boss prophesied, more cheerful yet, "you'll likely get shot, between Dugger and the Bugovics."

"Sunny will handle that," said Smoky, unbothered. "He's quite a fightin' man, Sunny is."

Time clicked on. At last the loggers began turning in. Sunny and Smoky Horn paired up in the bunk they had taken together. When the lights were out and snores began, Smoky got up and quietly slipped into his boots and mackinaw. He edged through the thick shadows to the drying line over which the chunkout boss had slung his clothes. Then he drifted out.

It seemed a long hour to Sunny before his working twin came in again. Smoky halted again at the drying line, then came on.

"What luck?" Sunny whispered.

"All we need," Smoky whispered back as he crawled into the blankets. "You don't mind sleepin' with a half dozen sticks of dynamite under our bunk, do you, Sunny?"

"Not if it's your dynamite."

"Hell, we eat it raw!"

"Yeah—if it's got whisky on it—"

"We howl in our sleep."

On that refrain of the timber-coast version of the ring-tailed roarer's war chant the Trouble Twins piped down.

STILL it rained. Sunny and Smoky Horn, primed with a logging camp breakfast, unshouldered their tools at the big Douglas fir, and swabbed the drip from their faces. Smoky lined out a falling strip for the fir, and stepped it off. A hundred feet out in the down timber he crouched down and carefully emptied a bulging pocket.

The fighting twin looked up through the gray rain at the rim of the high bluff. McGowl, Dugger, the timekeeper, the chunkhout boss and four others were ganged up there, watching.

"Damn' buzzards," Sunny muttered.

He moved into the standing timber, taking along two shovels which the twins had brought up with their falling gear. Behind a windfall that lay close to the fir he began to dig. Pretty soon Smoky joined him, and the two scooped out a trench under some six feet of the windfall's length. It was half as deep when Smoky straightened up.

"All set," he said. "We can hunch down in there, and let the chips fall where they may."

They grinned encouragingly at each other and hiked back to the down-timber side of the big fir. The tree's root-spread was high enough to call for springboards, but Smoky decided that they'd be safer if they kept on the ground. So they swung up axes and began to hew out the undercut. They worked fast, the blades biting deep. The big chips flew out as from a machine. The watchers on the bluff were seeing timber-falling as it should be done.

Silently, as always, the little Horn men notched the undercut into a sidewise V, and then moved around the tree with the crosscut saw. They kept it shuttling in steady strokes, pausing only to drip kerosene on the teeth and rakers

when they struck a pitch pocket, until the wedges had to be driven into the kerf. Then Smoky worked with slow caution, measuring the span of bark between kerf and undercut on his side and Sunny's every few strokes, tapping this wedge and then that one. He was dropping this hundred and fifty-foot tree to strike six bunched sticks of dynamite. It was a small target.

At last the crosscut raked close to the breaking point.

"She'll talk, this here trip," Smoky said.

Looking up, Sunny saw a shudder in the green bough masses against the gray cloud drifts. A giant groan burst from the gash in the tree.

Something fell from the quivering butt bough.

With a sudden, sharp shout Sunny grabbed his working twin by a sleeve and yanked him toward the windfall. The something plunked in layers of leaf mold behind them. It plunked, and that was all. Smoky pulled up and wheeled around at the trench. The fir still stood, the span of solid wood between the saw kerf and the undercut withstanding the strain from the wedges for the moment.

"She needs a couple more licks," Smoky said grimly. "I'll go do 'em, Sunny."

"You will like hell," Sunny said, for once hard-lipped. "Not with that kind of stuff showerin' on you, you won't."

"I'm bossin' the work," Smoky came back, as hard. "You stay right where you are. Hear me?"

Chance broke the strain. In the timber behind them, brush crashed as though a bull were stampeding through it. A bull's bellow roared with it, but the roar was from a man. Turning, the Trouble Twins saw Bush Face struggling in the grip of two other whiskered burlies.

"No—no!" bawled Bush Face. "I don' blow up boys! Hey, you boys, coom off—pack— Noo! Unh—"

The other two had choked him down.

"Git that rifle you stashed," Sunny ordered swiftly. "I'll face 'em up, like I always do—

"Hell," Smoky protested, "I'd ruther rassel 'em. If we could lick seven Bulgarians—"

"I don't want you to shoot. Just hold the gun on 'em. Get goin' now."

Smoky ducked down through the underbrush. Sunny headed on for the three Bugovics. Bush Face was down now and the other two were trying to sit on him. They looked younger and tougher, and the beard of one was short stubble. He started up, fists out, as Sunny came close. Sunny halted.

"You're the high-rigger, ain't you?" he said, innocent and smiling. "A gent who's used to climbin' spar trees?"

The man stiffened; then he looked sullenly dumb. "No savvy," he growled.

"Don't you, huh?" said Sunny sweetly. "Then you won't understand me when I call you a black-hearted, ape-headed, skunk-souled—" He sloped into words that seldom see print. He said them with his innocent smile, but they brought the red up through young Bugovic's blue-black stubble and a blaze to his eyes. "I wanted to tell you, you so and so," Sunny concluded brightly, "that I've spotted the bark-gashes left by your climbing irons in ever' tree that you've loaded. I wanted to check 'em over with you, and we could both go about our business. Way it is, I'll have to take you to jail and hunt up an interpreter. Hold 'em, Smoky!"

Young Bugovic turned with a snarl. The second one sprang up from Bush Face and all three stared into the black muzzle of a rifle in Smoky Horn's hands. Young Bugovic growled something to the others, then turned back to Sunny.

"You win, runt," he said.

"Thank you, kindly," Sunny smiled. "Now let's get down to business . . . ."

Some twenty minutes later the Trouble Twins parted with the three Bugovics on terms that were peaceable

if not exactly friendly. Bush Face's rifle was given back to him, with kind thanks for his good intentions. The younger Bugovic was convinced that the little loggers had evidence against him that would stick in court another time. As they traversed the bench he pointed out the other dynamite trees. There were nine beside the big fir, loaded to blast when they were brought down.

"By trenchin' us shelters we can easy clean 'em out," Smoky said, as they headed back. "No worse than shootin' stumps. When we get that contract in black and white we'll fall the dynamite ones first. What you say, Sunny?"

Sunny Horn said, "Hell's bells! Look!"

MR. J. P. McGOWL, strained beyond endurance by the delay in falling the big fir, had at last led a reluctant gang around from the rim of the bluff. It was his notion that the two tough little men had taken a getaway trail. He drove Gil Dugger ahead of him in the timber, the push forking out his gun as they approached the standing trees.

Suddenly, as they glimpsed the Horn men deep in the woods, they heard the ominous crack of breaking timber. The wind had slackened, and the big fir was leaning toward them. The nearest shelter was a pothole stump. The two men flattened out in the mud.

A giant, swishing whine rustled through the rain, then the dull boom of crashing timber. In the instant an earth-shaking explosion heaved up an immense geyser of shattered boughs, forest earth, chunks and slivers of blasted wood. Hours of that, it seemed to Mr. McGowl. Then a vasty quiet. Mr. McGowl wondered if this might be the end. He didn't want to move and find out. He did not move, until four, hard hands hauled him to his feet. He blinked at the Trouble Twins through thick dribbles of mud.

"I hate to dun a man in the shape you're in," said Sunny Horn, "but I'd take it kindly if you're ready to pay that bet."

Mr. McGowl swabbed his face. A grateful warmth suffused him, a great gladness just to be alive. It swelled in a heat of triumph, with the conviction that at last the Hemlock Canyon job was licked. Gil Dugger clinched that for him.

The trap-faced push came up from the mud, fighting mad and shooting wild. He was hardly responsible, as a chunk had plunked him on the back of the head and he probably had the impression that one of the two runts before him had hit him with a club. He swung his smoking gun at Sunny Horn.

Smoky Horn jumped for him. There was no time for the favorite trick of the Trouble Twins now. But Smoky had another on tap. His right hand came from his mackinaw pocket with three yellow sticks, and Gil Dugger's blood went cold as he saw that fistful of yellow hell swinging for his short ribs. He heeled backward with a violent jerk and sprawled again in the pothole. Smoky took one easy hop on him and then left him alone.

"I'm a man of my word," stated Mr. McGowl. "You get your terms."

"You ought to told me you was totin' dynamite around all that time," said Sunny reproachfully. "That's fightin' stuff. That's my part."

"I wasn't totin' it all the time," Smoky explained. "That fir, fallin' wild like it did, missed the sticks I planted. I picked them up as we run to help Mr. McGowl. That leaves the final proof that the high-rigger planted his bombs up in the trees and not in the ground. You shore was smart to figger it out last night."

"Maybe we're both kinder smart," confessed Sunny. "Anyhow we eat dynamite, don't we?"

"Raw," said Smoky. "If it's got whisky on it."

THE FORTY-FOUR POCKET PIECE

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

LEFT to shift for himself when twelve years old, Young Hardesty had earned a precarious living by sweeping out the Silver City saloon in the mining town of Bowdry. The advent of the outlaw, Tonto Charley, the climax of a gun fight in the saloon, and Tonto Charley's flight into the Arizona desert turned the tide of Young Hardesty's misfortunes. Through a series of happy accidents he had become Bedrock's partner.

Bedrock, as solid as his name, was a good man to tie to. Three years they had worked an old abandoned mine together, pecking out just enough high grade ore to keep them fed and optimistic. Some day they would strike it rich. The mine, nameless when they discovered it, Bedrock had christened "Mebby So."

This amused Young Hardesty. He knew, only too well, that prospects didn't always pan out. He knew, also, that things didn't always go right when a prospect did pan out. After many years of hardship and poverty Young Hardesty's father had struck it rich, sold his claim, and had drunk himself to death. Experience had taught Young Hardesty that almost everything one did was a gamble. Luck didn't play any favorites, or always award the industrious.

Fifteen years old, as black as an Apache, tough-sinewed from hard work, Young Hardesty was as handy as a grown man. His father had taught him to know and respect the desert. Bedrock had taught him to know and respect himself. Consequently when Bedrock, limping about the camp with a bandaged foot, suggested that the boy take one of the burros and go to Bowdry for some much needed supplies, Young Hardesty accepted the mission without comment. The journey itself did not worry him in the least. But he was definitely careful about getting ready. A trip to Bowdry

with Bedrock would have been fun. But now he was going alone, as the representative of Bedrock and the Mebby So. This was business.

Young Hardesty threw the pack saddle on the little gray burro which stood near the mine tunnel on the hillside. The kyacks were hung, the pack sheet snugged down. Blinking short-sightedly in the morning sun, Bedrock counted out the needed supplies on his fingers. Young Hardesty grinned as Bedrock specified the last three items—a pair of rubber boots, a pint of castor oil and a lantern. The rubber boots, Bedrock explained, were not common to the territory. He had sent to Chicago for them.

"I can see where that lantern will come in handy," declared Young Hardesty.

Bedrock chuckled. "Your canteen, now. Did you fill it?"

"What the hell is a canteen for?" Young Hardesty asked pleasantly.

"For fools to leave empty—sometimes."

"Well, this one ain't belonged to a fool yet. I got plenty grub in the kyacks, and matches. I'm takin' your Winchester."

"How about your six shooter instead?"

"I don't want any six shooter knockin' against my leg when I'm walkin'. I'm takin' the Winchester. When I draw down on somethin' I want it to drop."

Again old Bedrock chuckled. "Injuns, for instance?"

"Huh! You can't throw a scare into me that way. Ain't been no Apaches off the reservation for a dog's age. I'm takin' the rifle just for company."

Bedrock's long white beard quivered. "Don't forget to take the burro, also. You'll need him."

Young Hardesty's attempt to keep from grinning was not a success. "Do you think I packed him just so he could get his picture tooken? If I'd wanted the picture of a burro I'd 'a' hung the kyacks on you."

"My, but you're bright and shining this morning! I ought to turn you up and wallop you where your britches draw tight."

"Just try it! Me, I'm over the hill. Seein' it's you—so long, pardner."

"So long, son. I'll be here when you get back."

"Bedrock by name, and bedrock by nature," chanted Young Hardesty as he punched the burro down the zigzag trail leading to the desert floor. Up near the mine tunnel stood Bedrock, a broad tall figure, white-bearded, as dignified as a patriarch. He had never married. Young Hardesty was his adopted boy, perhaps all the dearer to him because of it.

Since his father had died some three years past, Young Hardesty had had to play the man. He knew how both by observation and experience. When you pulled out of camp for three or four days, or three or four months for that matter, you didn't let on you cared. You just lighted a shuck for where you were going. Any time you pulled out you might never get back again, especially if you traveled the desert. But you didn't let on, any more than you acted surprised when somebody you liked showed up suddenly, after being away a long time.

In spite of his resolution to act like a grown man, Young Hardesty turned to see if Bedrock was watching him. Old Bedrock was. Young Hardesty made himself believe that Bedrock looked lonesome, as an excuse for waving farewell. In answer to his salute a stentorian "so long" rolled down from the mine and out across the silence. It warmed the boy's heart. Now he was satisfied to face the thirty long hot miles across the dry spot. He thumped the burro across the rump. "Hop along, Ginger. To hell with this here 'so long' business. We're goin' somewhere!"

They were going somewhere. But the best of it all was that Bedrock would be there when they got back.

The frown which had marked Young Hardesty's intensity in this business trip

slowly faded. As the long miles strung out behind him the journey began to take on the aspect of an adventure. He had grub, a pack burro, a rifle—and no boss. At the mine Bedrock was his boss. But now he was his own man. Folks in Bowdry wouldn't say, "There goes that kid, Hardesty, now." They would say, "There goes Bedrock's pardner."

BROAD reaches of sand and outcrop, lava ridge and volcanic cone, shimmered in the morning sun. His reactions to space and silence undulled, in spite of his familiarity with the desert, Young Hardesty began to feel smaller and smaller as the gray hills he had left drew slowly back, losing their sharp contour. Occasionally he turned to glance at the distant dark spot marking the tunnel of the Mebby So. But looking back didn't get a man anywhere. For that matter looking ahead didn't seem to, either. There was no definable landmark to make for, only direction to follow. The burro's ears wobbled forward and back, forward and back as if they were set on ball bearings.

Young Hardesty watched the burro's tiny feet. They scarcely made a sound. He took to listening to the crunch of his own heavy-soled shoes, to counting his steps. But that was a good way to get tired. He decided to think of something alien to the journey. Through a sequence of related incidents he arrived at Tonto Charley. Tonto had been his idol. Tonto, who three years ago had vanished in the desert haze overlying the strip of land bordering Old Mexico. Tonto Charley was an outlaw. Would he ever show up again? Probably not.

Wrapped in his reflections for the next hour or so, Young Hardesty plodded silently behind the burro. Ginger suddenly stopped. Coiled in the shadow of a low rock lay a brownish yellow rattler. Young Hardesty drew the Winchester from beneath the lash rope. The rifle boomed. The coil of brownish yellow writhed. Heretofore Ginger had never even wiggled an ear when a rifle barked. Whether he now thought to escape the long journey ahead, or whether he was actually startled, was a secondary consideration. He bolted. Grub, matches, water and spare ammunition were gone in a twinkling.

After him sped Young Hardesty, employing loud epithets not complimentary to a burro's family and habits. It was a ludicrous exhibition on the burro's part. As a mere spectator Young Hardesty would have enjoyed it. As proprietor of the burro, however, and dependent upon him for food and water, Young Hardesty's end of it was anything but a joke. To trudge ten or twelve miles back to camp empty-handed as the sequel to his first independent trip for supplies was not to be thought of. He'd catch that doggone burro or bust the boiler trying. Bust the burro's boiler, too, when he caught him. To stampede like that! Why, the old fool had been raised among rattlesnakes and rifles and rock blasting.

Slung from the crosstree, the canteen bumped and whanged the burro's shoulder. Ginger increased his speed as a stone from Young Hardesty's hot fist took him in the rump. Across a wide, sandy flat he galloped stiffly, like a mechanical toy. Ahead of him loomed a deep arroyo. Down into it he clattered. When Young Hardesty arrived he found Ginger flat on his back, legs in the air, apparently making no effort to get to his feet.

"Serves you right!" panted Young Hardesty. "Hope you broke your dam' neck!" He didn't hope so, but he wanted the burro to think he did. Ginger rolled a speculative eye which said plainly, "Lend a hand and get me out of this mess. The pack saddle is jammed between two rocks and I can't budge."

Now that he had caught up with his supplies, Young Hardesty was in no great haste to lend a hand. "Look

mighty comfortable, now, don't you? Goin' to take a little sleep, or are you just sunnin' your belly to see how it feels?"

Slowly he walked round the burro. Finally he took hold of its tail and heaved. Restored to a proper equilibrium, Ginger shook himself. Young Hardesty stared. A dark spot began to spread on the sand. The canteen was crushed flat.

Young Hardesty could use language when necessary, but this was too serious for mere words. He was a good ten miles from camp, and already out of water. The sensible thing to do was to turn back and get another canteen. But youthful pride forbade. He just couldn't face Bedrock. It was an unavoidable accident. Also it was Young Hardesty's first trip for supplies alone. Young Hardesty drank the mouthful of water left in the flattened canteen and tossed it away.

He reslung the pack and drew down the lash rope. It is to his credit that he did not take it out of the burro with a club or his boots. Instead, he hazed him quietly back to the trail.

TOWARD noon he arrived at the fork where one trail branched toward Indian Wells, the nearest water hole, the other leading to Bowdry. Far to the West loomed Point of Rocks.

"I'm just nothin', plumb in the middle of nowhere," grumbled Young Hardesty. "But we're goin' somewhere. Mebbe you won't like it, but we're goin' to Indian Wells, you knock-kneed, scuttle-eared, pig-eyed dam' fool. You're just a walkin' mistake!"

Bowdry lay to the north. Indian Wells, girt with saw-tooth pinnacles, desolate, the jumping-off place when one was going into the Bad Lands, lay to the east, six miles off the trail. But there was no help for it. He would have to get to water. Already his imagination teased him with false thirst.

Heat waves danced across the levels, shimmered on outcrop and ridge. As the noon sun burned down, and boy and burro drew nearer to the forlorn, raw landmarks surrounding the Bad Lands water hole, Young Hardesty felt that he was moving in a sea of heat from which there was no escape. Although they progressed at a good three miles an hour, they seemed to be literally crawling.

"When you are too dry to whistle and your tongue is too stiff to sing, just hum a little tune to yourself, inside," Young Hardesty's father had told him—"a tune that you can walk to. Thinking of yourself is just adding compound interest to your misery."

Once or twice while with his father on a prospecting trip Young Hardesty had known what it was to be without water. Now he knew he didn't actually need water. But the fact that he didn't have any irritated him.

"I could have killed that rattler with a chunk of rock," he reflected. "Saved a cartridge, and Ginger wouldn't have stampeded. Hell of it is he never acted gun-shy before. Probably next time he'll let me rest the old musket on his back for a dead sure bull's-eye, and not bat a whisker. Git along on your stilts, you bungle-head, or I'll make you into crow bait." Ginger "got along" a few quick steps, then settled to his accustomed stride.

Upthrust against the hot, naked sky, the distant pinnacles gleamed red in the sun. Night black shadows lay along the north side of the rocky buttress surrounding Indian Wells. About mid-afternoon Young Hardesty was opposite the opening known as the West Gate—two shouldering masses of cracked and dusty black lava opening to a defile which led to a circular flat of smooth sand.

Although still far from water, the burro quickened its stride. Another hour and they arrived at the water hole itself,

a shallow sink near the south edge of the basin. Young Hardesty lay on his belly and drank. Ginger did not seem especially thirsty.

Six miles to back track to the main trail. Fifteen miles from the fork to Bowdry. Twenty-one miles would mean that he would not arrive in Bowdry until late that night, even if he started now. The store would be closed. Also, he would have to camp near town. He didn't like Bowdry, nor its citizens. He would camp where he was, scare up a little brush for a fire, and light out for Bowdry about daybreak.

"Second mistake," said Young Hardesty. "No brush in this dam' basin. Bedrock would have packed along some on the way. But it's early yet." Tying the burro's lead rope to a finger of rock, Young Hardesty set out to gather some brush and roots for a fire. It took him longer than he had anticipated. A sort of twilight hung over the basin when he returned. He was crossing the sandy flat toward the water hole when he thought he smelled smoke. He grinned. "That burro's just naturally found the matches. And now he's set himself afire. Serves him right!" But the humor of this absurdity faded from Young Hardesty's eyes. Smoke in that region meant a human being. Probably some old prospector had come in through the East Gate, and was boiling his evening coffee.

The burro, which had been tied near the water hole, had disappeared. The light was going fast, but Young Hardesty could still see Ginger's tracks. They led to a sort of cove east of the water hole—a spot where Young Hardesty had planned to make his camp for the night. Beyond the shoulder of the buttress a wisp of flame gleamed near the south wall. Above it squatted a vague, dark figure. Nearby lay an indistinguishable heap that looked like a bundle of gray clothing.

"Hello, the camp!" called Young Hardesty.

A guttural grunt answered. The muzzle of a rifle showed above the fire. Young Hardesty's back grew cold. He was now near enough to distinguish the face gleaming above the rifle—a broad face like black bronze, high cheek bones, wide jaws, little eyes, not much more than points of light. Young Hardesty stopped, his whole being so nearly paralyzed he could hardly lift his arm to make the peace sign.

The lone Apache laid down his rifle, grunted and bent over the fire. Young Hardesty shivered. The Indian was roasting strips of red meat and eating them half raw. In the middle of the fire bubbling and boiling stood Young Hardesty's coffee pot. The heap of gray, which looked like clothing, resolved itself into the burro, Ginger, stretched out on the sand with his throat cut.

HIS lips stiff with horror, Young Hardesty stood watching the Apache guzzle the dripping meat.

"Third mistake," reflected the boy. "Left the Winchester—and he's got it."

The Apache pulled a strip of scorched meat from the fire and slit off a piece.

"Eat?" he said.

Young Hardesty knew enough of the language to appreciate the invitation. He also knew that if he acted queer it just wouldn't do. He nodded, and glancing at what was left of Ginger, squatted opposite the Indian. Already Young Hardesty had recovered his wits. He noted a sawed-off Sharp's rifle within the Apache's reach, the red knife in his hand, and, alongside the Sharp's, old Bedrock's brown Winchester. Everything you did was a gamble. There hadn't been an Apache off the reservation for a dog's age. Young Hardesty accepted a strip of the scorched meat and began to chew. Two points of sharp black light glistened and gleamed above the fire.

The Apache's chin dripped. He ate as

if he were half starved. His calico shirt was torn and filthy, his trousers were the color of ashes, his boot-legged moccasins were old and worn. Broad and squat, his neck was so short his chin easily touched his heavy chest. Round his head was a twisted red bandanna. His hair lay on his shoulders in snaky wisps clotted with filth.

"Nice evenin'," said Young Hardesty, nodding pleasantly.

The Apache grunted and continued to gorge on the burro meat.

Like the Navajos, who separated from the original Apache tribe when the Spaniards invaded the Southwest, the Apaches often understand considerably more English than they are willing to speak. Aware that a lone Navajo or an Apache talking with a white man will often speak what little English he knows, when he wouldn't dream of doing so if another Indian were present, Young Hardesty decided to ask a few questions. Had the Apache come a long way? The Apache nodded. Was the Apache much hungry? The answer was, "Not now." Young Hardesty pointed to the dead burro. "You kill?"

"Kill," replied the Apache. He knew that word.

"That was my burro."

The black points of light were expressionless.

"That's my rifle." Young Hardesty gestured.

"My gun," grunted the Apache.

In spite of his fear, Young Hardesty's temper began to rise. "You kill my burro and take my gun. I'll set the agent after you, hot."

The broad-faced Apache grinned. "Agent long way. Gun here."

Young Hardesty didn't know what logic meant but he knew that an Indian's replies are bedrock. They touch bottom. Bedrock? What would old Bedrock have done under these circumstances? Hard to say. In the first place Bedrock wouldn't have let himself get into such a tight. Canteen busted, burro dead, rifle and grub gone—this was about the end of Young Hardesty's world. If the Apache beefed him it couldn't be much worse.

The Indian picked up a small wicker water bottle and gestured toward the spring. Young Hardesty took it, wishing he had some cyanide to put into the water. That would fix Mr. Apache mighty quick. Already the boy began to suspect that the Apache didn't intend to kill him now. He would use him, make him work for him, as captives were often required to do. There was an Indian word for them which meant slaves.

But later—at some turn of the trail, the Apache would kill him, as he would slit the throat of a worn-out horse. It was in the books. Apaches were killers by nature. Clever fighters and tough warriors, but killers first. The water bottle was filled and handed to the Apache. Young Hardesty suddenly felt sick. The idea of eating Ginger had been too much for him. Turning his back on the Indian he vomited. Behind him he heard a guttural laugh. Then and there the boy determined to kill the Apache.

Ideas were easy enough, but to make them work—that was the big job. The Apache had both rifles, a knife, and the vigilance of a hungry wolf. But even wolves slept after they had gorged themselves. If the Apache did sleep, undoubtedly he would keep the guns under him. There would be no chance to get to them. Young Hardesty thought of heaving the embers of the fire up into the Indian's face and then making a jump for the Winchester. But the fire had now died down to a little heap of gray ashes.

Young Hardesty reached for the coffee pot, filled a tin cup and drank. He felt better. The coffee would help to keep him awake. Suddenly he thought of a plan. He rose. "Guess I'll pull my

freight." He began to walk toward the West Gate. A deep voice stopped him. The Apache was on his feet, the sawed-off Sharp's in his hands. Not till Young Hardesty returned and again squatted by the fire did the Indian lay the gun down. Knowing that no matter what happened, he must not show fear, Young Hardesty grinned.

"You want me stay and make fire in the morning?"

The Apache nodded. So the Indian intended to camp at the water hole that night.

IT was a tough job to curl down and pretend you were asleep, with that burro-eater only a couple of yards away, sitting looking at you as if he could see clean through you. But Young Hardesty made the bluff—closed his eyes and tried to keep them closed. The night was warm, the water hole as still as space itself. A little breeze finally flirted across the moonlit sand. With it came the rank smell of the Apache. Young Hardesty squeezed his eyes tight, only to open them again as he felt that the Indian was bending over him. But the renegade didn't have the knife in his hand. He held the lash rope. Young Hardesty was tempted to wriggle to one side, jump up and run. But he knew the Apache could easily catch him. So he merely protested as the Apache bound his hands.

"Your boy," said Young Hardesty. "I work."

Throughout the night Young Hardesty dozed and wakened. His sleep was dreamless, but his waking moments were a torture. He saw himself a little heap of bones by the water hole, alongside Ginger's skeleton. The coyotes would come and play with their bones—gnaw them and scatter them about the basin. Some day someone would find them, and then Bedrock would know what had become of his partner.

Or maybe Bedrock would worry, and take out and look for him. Bedrock would find the flattened canteen in the arroyo and probably conclude that his partner had died of thirst. But he would keep on tracking. If a heavy rain didn't come up, he could easily follow the tracks to Indian Wells. Again Young Hardesty slept. When he awakened he revised his first nightmare. The Apache was renegade, lone-wolfing. He would use his captive so long as his captive was useful, then slit his throat. Soon or late that would happen—but when?

Dawn had barely touched the highest pinnacle when the Apache loosed Young Hardesty and gestured toward the dead burro. Young Hardesty made a fire from his own armful of roots and brush. He took the knife and walked slowly toward the body of Ginger, thinking that when he took the meat back to the fire he might get a chance to knife the Apache. But he would have to make a good job of it. Apaches were tough and died hard. If he could get him in the neck, right in that little hollow of the shoulder—

While Young Hardesty was still bending above the carcass of Ginger he noted a shadow just beyond him, a shadow that had appeared suddenly. Hacking away at the carcass—the Apache's knife was none too sharp—Young Hardesty saw that the shadow moved slightly. As he rose to go back to the fire he was confronted by his captor standing all but over him. Something in the little, snakelike eyes made the boy shudder. He walked to the fire, tossed the knife down and laid the strips of meat on the embers.

"Make coffee?" he asked, gesturing toward the kyacks.

The Apache grunted an affirmative. "You good boy, I no kill."

The coffee pot was on the fire, the meat sizzling and curling. "Sure, I'm a good boy. I work." Young Hardesty was watching those two tiny points of

black light that seemed to bore into him. The Indian's friendly speech meant nothing. Worse than that, it meant that he contemplated killing him. The boy needed no confirmation of his suspicions. Every move of the Indian betokened extreme wariness, cunning, primitive lust for blood. He drank much coffee, consumed enough meat to feed three men.

"Mebbyso I kill."

"Now you're talkin'!" Young Hardesty forced a grin. "But I'm tellin you, Saleratus, that if you try it, I'll cut your dam' heart out."

The Apache didn't understand the entire speech but he got the gist of it. "You brave, huh?"

"You been hangin' around the fort some. You sabe white man's talk. Yes, I'm so brave I'm scared of myself. Ever feel that way?"

"How you cut um heart—no knife?"

"Oh, I ain't worryin'. Say, which way you headed?"

The broad face grew darker. The Apache made no reply.

Breakfast over, and Young Hardesty half sick from eating burro meat—the Apache would not let him use any of his own provisions—they struck camp. One of the kyacks, loaded with meat and what provisions were left, was rigged as a pack sack. Young Hardesty was made to carry it. Emptying the Winchester and putting the shells in the leather pouch at his belt, the Apache handed the rifle to the boy. Taking up his own Sharp's, the Apache gestured. Young Hardesty was to go ahead, toward the East Gate of the water hole. Evidently the Indian was heading for the Bad Lands.

Gritting his teeth, Young Hardesty plodded along in the hot sweep of the morning sun. The laden kyack sawed into his shoulders, the Winchester seemed to weigh like lead. But he soon fell into a measured stride. It was faster than he would have walked ordinarily, because the renegade, in spite of his heavy breakfast, moved briskly.

"He won't beef me, just yet," reflected Young Hardesty. "He'll make me pack this stuff as long as I can hold out." How long would that be? Again the boy's mind swung round to the question of how to get the better of his captor. But what chance had he? The Indian had his knife and a loaded rifle. He also had all the ammunition. The Winchester was now about as useful as a yucca stalk.

Young Hardesty wished that he had some tobacco to chew. He had a jackknife in his pocket, some twine, and a tiny specimen of ore. He knew that. He felt in his pocket. The other things were there, but no tobacco. He shifted the rifle to his other hand and felt in his other pocket. Nothing there. Hold on, though! His fingers encountered a smooth, circular something. He remembered now. He had stuck a forty-four shell in his pocket one day after cutting a cross in the lead—for luck. Mexican trick. You never missed when you cut a cross on the bullet. The forty-four was a sort of pocket-piece.

Sweat ran down into his eyes. The trail, or rather, way, they took was rough with tufa and stretches of gravel, black, as though it had been burned. Behind him padded the quick, all but soundless steps of the Apache. In spite of his attempt to set a swift pace, Young Hardesty began to lag. Once the Indian spoke to him. Young Hardesty, thinking hard, came out of it and stepped faster. When an Apache's pony plays out, he gets his throat cut. It was up to Young Hardesty not to play out.

THREE hours they journeyed without a pause. The giant pinnacles marking the eastern gateway to the water hole loomed nearer. Presently the travelers were passing through a great rock-walled defile. Beyond, shimmering in the sun,

lay butte after butte, black, rugged, without vegetation of any kind. Tumbled blocks of red stone, and blocks of jet black lava lay scattered here and there. The trail was sharp with tufa. Heat struck hard from both above and below. Although not aware of it, again Young Hardesty lagged. He jumped as something sharp jabbed him in the back. Silently the Apache had stolen up and urged him on with his knife. Young Hardesty quickened his stride. Apaches use their knives to jab their ponies into a faster gait.

Young Hardesty slipped his hand into his overall pocket and felt of the forty-four shell with the cross on the bullet. A cross was lucky, mebby. Mebby not. A deeper jab urged him on again. This time, in spite of himself, he cried out.

The Apache laughed. "You good boy. You work."

Young Hardesty had heard about Apaches and Navajos being brutal to their slaves. But he had never thought much about it, then. His fear of being killed was submerged now in shame—shame that he, a white man, should be the dog for an Indian to kick and cuff and order about. From his shame was bred anger—real, white-hot anger that consumed fear. He had a Winchester in his hand and that one marked shell in his pocket. "If he jabs me again I'll kill him, as sure as God made rocks." Young Hardesty tied to that promise, clung to it until it became the only thought in his mind.

He grew thirsty and anger increased his thirst. The Indian was packing the wicker water bottle. Young Hardesty told himself he would drop dead before he would ask the Apache for a drink. Where they were going and to what purpose did not interest Young Hardesty in the least. He was too intent upon escaping to think of anything else. If he could get just far enough ahead to shake off the heavy pack and load the Winchester, he might drop his tormentor. But the Apache always kept an even distance behind. Quickening his own pace by a mighty effort, Young Hardesty tried to put a few more yards between them. But the Indian seemed like his shadow. The sun was almost straight up now, and hammering hard on sand and lava. Sweat stung Young Hardesty's eyes. His shoulders and back felt numb from the weight of the pack.

"Reckon I know what a pack burro feels like," he muttered. "That dam' Apache killed our burro. And me goin' back to Bedrock and tellin' him I let an Indian get away with that!"

Again Young Hardesty lagged and again the Apache's knife point stung him. Young Hardesty gritted his teeth. Tears of anger and helplessness welled in his eyes. He bent his head and plodded on. The country round about became a vast, jumbled amphitheater of butte and outcrop, sand flat and scattered lava, swimming in white light—unreal, a kind of terrible dream.

He could never remember by what route they arrived at the spring on the north side of Black Butte. He could only recollect the grunt of the Apache signaling him to stop. Automatically Young Hardesty swung out of the pack, lay on his belly and drank. At the other side of the spring the Apache was refilling the water bottle.

As Young Hardesty walked over to take up his pack again, he slipped his hand into his overall pocket. Fearful that he had dreamed about the forty-four shell with a cross cut on the bullet, he hardly dared to hope. But he could feel the cartridge. He drew it out. The Apache was squatting a few yards away. Picking up the Winchester, Bedrock's partner slipped the shell into the chamber.

He closed the lever with extreme caution. But as careful as he was the Apache heard the cluck of metal against metal.

Young Hardesty whirled.

The Apache had reached out for the sawed-off Sharp's beside him. He knew the Winchester was empty. He had unloaded it himself. But even so, he was wary.

As in a strange trance, Young Hardesty saw the muzzle of the Sharp's rifle shift ever so lightly, knew that now the Apache meant to kill him.

The boy's mind was working swiftly, yet he felt he had been looking at the Apache over the sights of the Winchester for a long time. In reality it was but the fraction of a second. Young Hardesty's rifle was centered on the Indian's calico shirt. They were but some five or six yards apart. Long before his finger squeezed the trigger, the boy's mind had fired the shot which took the Apache at the base of the breastbone just where the ribs join with it.

Simultaneously the Sharp's boomed. Young Hardesty felt as if he had been struck on the head with a heavy iron bar. For a moment he stood watching. The Apache straightened up and grasped his chest with both hands; coughing horribly, he reeled and sank down. With him went the sun, the light, the images of butte and ridge. Young Hardesty dropped, but never knew when he hit the ground.

SLOWLY the light came back, and as slowly Young Hardesty tried to adjust himself to a strange situation. There were many legs about him here and there—booted legs, blue legs with yellow stripes. And yonder stood many horses. Above the saddles rose the leather mouths of carbine buckets. What in thunder were cavalrymen doing in Bedrock's camp?

A face heavily tanned bent above him. "How are you making it, son?"

"Where's Bedrock?"

"Don't know him. Is Bedrock your father?"

"He's my pardner. What the hell you fellas doin' up here at the mine?"

"This isn't a mine, son. This is Black Butte water hole."

It took Young Hardesty some time to realize where he was. Even then he couldn't account for the cavalrymen. Again the heavily tanned face with the crisp mustache and blue eyes was bending above him. "I don't need to ask you who got him, son. That's plain enough. But what happened?"

Bit by bit Young Hardesty told his story. Meanwhile the cavalrymen squatted round, nodding, frequently commenting. The Apache, they said, was Nai-chi-ta, who had filled up on tizwin, killed a prospector in the Dragoon Mountains, and instituted a little private war of his own with the whites.

Surmising that the Apache might make for Indian Wells, the cavalrymen had headed for the east gateway, finding at Black Butte water hole the man they were after, and Young Hardesty—both, they supposed, dead. Aware that the soldiers would get after him, Nai-chi-ta had circled for the Bad Lands on foot, after having his pony shot from under him in a skirmish with some White Mountain cowboys.

"How's your head?" asked the lieutenant.

"It's on yet."

"You're lucky."

"Took more than luck to get the best of Nai-chi-ta," commented a yellow legs.

Young Hardesty felt a pardonable pride in being complimented by a hard-boiled cavalryman. But he said nothing. You didn't say anything in a case like that, unless you cracked a joke. And he wasn't feeling especially humorous. A forty-five Sharp's slug had cut a ridge in his scalp. His head felt thick and about twice as large as it ought to be. Besides, he was afoot, his burro dead. And the mine supplies still in Bowdry. No, the Apache was dead. But that wasn't helping Bedrock any, now.

Bedrock would understand. But he

would be saying to himself all the time, "We got to have those supplies. Reckon I'll go get 'em myself."

Young Hardesty sat up dizzily. "I guess I'll be pullin' my freight."

The lieutenant of the troop laughed. "Where to, son?"

"Bowdry. I set out to get our mine supplies, and I'm goin' to get 'em."

"It's a long drill to Bowdry. You haven't any outfit."

"Mebby I don't know that. What I mean—I got to get them supplies."

The lieutenant stared at Young Hardesty in a quizzical fashion. "You're a tough kid. You ought to last a long time, even in Arizona. If you're not too proud to sit on a cavalry mount, maybe we could cut down that trip for you."

"Where you fellas headed?"

The lieutenant glanced at his men. "I'm going into Bowdry and send a report to headquarters. Then, we're short of grub. Can you stand up?"

Young Hardesty found that he could. One of the troopers fetched him a cup of coffee. Young Hardesty drank it and felt better. His all but empty kyack was laden on a pack mule and the troop turned toward Indian Wells.

Before they left Young Hardesty had glanced around, wondering what had become of the body of Nai-chi-ta. He didn't ask any questions. Nor was the Apache's name again mentioned during the long journey to Indian Wells. Here, about noon that day, Young Hardesty again told his story of that unforgettable night, when Nai-chi-ta squatted by the fire and gorged strips of burro meat. There was little left of the burro now. The buzzards and coyotes had been busy. The troop moved on. That night they arrived in Bowdry.

Next morning, Young Hardesty was a hero. But he affected extreme indifference. Nevertheless he was not unaware that his sudden and temporary prestige was of value. The storekeeper loaned him a burro and pack rig. Old Bedrock was good for it, he said.

"So am I," came quickly from Young Hardesty. "I'm Bedrock's pardner. So anything he wants I'm good for, and he wants them supplies dam' bad."

"How did you happen to bump off Nai-chi-ta?" asked the storekeeper.

Young Hardesty shrugged. "Ask the yellow legs. They're gov'ment men. You fellas said I was lyin' when I quit this town three years ago—that time when I told you the five dollars you found on Taggert was my money. But it was my money. And I got Nai-chi-ta. Do you think I got my head tied up just for looks?"

The storekeeper scratched his head. "Mebby you *could* tell me what Bedrock wants with a lantern, a pair of rubber boots and a pint of castor oil."

"That ain't so awful hard to figure. Bedrock's got rheumatics. And sometimes it rains at night up in our hills, when it does rain."

His back stiff with importance, Young Hardesty packed his supplies, bade farewell to the cavalrymen, and told them that if they ever had to chase Apaches up his way, to light down and eat with him and Bedrock. Just as Young Hardesty was about to leave, the lieutenant presented him with Nai-chi-ta's sawed-off Sharp's rifle.

"You might want to keep it as a souvenir," he said, laughing.

"I got one, already." Young Hardesty grinned as he touched his bandaged head. "But thanks, anyhow. It'll be somethin' to show Bedrock."

The troopers watched him go. But this time Young Hardesty did not turn and wave farewell. On he plodded behind the borrowed pack animal, humming a little tune. He would give the old Sharp's rifle to Bedrock to kind of make up for Ginger. And in spite of his constant effort to play the man, tears started to Young Hardesty's eyes as he thought of the little gray burro.

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

WE HEARD many good things from readers about the three-part story of Ben Thompson, written by Clyde Wantland, of San Antonio, Texas. I want to print here a long letter from an old Camp-Fire comrade, Pink Simms, of Lewiston, Montana, noted as a student of the Old West, who has frequently told us things we didn't know about the famous sheriffs and bad men.

I have been reading with avid interest Clyde Wantland's story of Ben Thompson, "On the Prod".

A few years after the killing of Ben Thompson and King Fisher I was in Santone and went to considerable trouble gathering data on Thompson. I had known Billy Thompson and while working on the Texas Trail had met many men who talked a great deal of Ben Thompson, and as Mr. Wantland says, a great many of them admired him. In fact, he had about as many friends among those men as Wyatt Earp had enemies, which is saying a lot. Another reason for my interest was that Billy Simms was a distant relative.

I had worked for a couple of years in Lincoln County, New Mexico. On the Loving-Goodnight Trail and up in the Neutral Strip with Lee Hall. Hall had known King Fisher, he admired the Goliad County fighter, talked often of him and believed that Fisher was the equal, as a gunfighter, if not superior, to any man in the west and he did not bar Thompson, Hickock or Wes' Hardin. His opinion was worth a lot as Hall was a man of great courage, highly proficient in the use of the revolver and was an excellent peace officer.

Last year Floyd Streeter, historian at the Fort Hays, Kansas, State College, started to dig up some facts about Ben Thompson's activity while he was in Kansas and especially about the killing of Sheriff Whitney in Ellsworth by Billy Thompson. A story appeared in another magazine some years ago about this killing which told how Ben Thompson had been arrested in a humiliating manner by Wyatt Earp for this killing. Mr. Streeter contacted me for the purpose of getting additional data about Thompson and I turned over everything I had, mostly clippings taken from Santone and Austin papers at the time of his death. The story of the killing of Sheriff Whitney was dug up in old Ellsworth by Mr. Streeter and his wife. He exploded completely the story of Wyatt Earp arresting Ben. This story was presumed to have come from Earp himself. Streeter, in his investigations, found no evidence that Wyatt was even there at the time.

I would like to call attention to some errors in Mr. Wantland's article, and there are some points upon which we do not agree, the last being merely a matter of personal opinion. I agree as to Thompson's courage for he had plenty of that, and it was of the bulldog variety that would send him against odds. The idea of Wyatt Earp intimidating him is preposterous; no man could do that, and he was considered far the superior of Wyatt in both gun ability and courage. One important thing Mr. Wantland does not mention is the fact that he seldom used a belt gun. He invented the shoulder holster and used it exclusively; Wes' Hardin saw it and developed his holstered vest, which was practically the same system.

I admire Ben Thompson for his courage but do not hold him in such a high regard as Wantland does. The historical records of the Santa Fe Railway will show that Ben sold them out to the D. & R. G., and names the sum he received. That is hard to dispute, for he turned the roundhouse over to them (D. & R. G.) before he left. When drunk and on a rampage he was a homicidal maniac and at such times was just as apt to shoot

at a man's back as not. The story I heard of the killing of Mark Wilson was quite different than the one Mr. Wantland tells. I was told that Ben framed the killing and hired a young man to throw lamp black in Wilson's face so that he would miss the first shot. Ben shot up Rowdy Joe's place in Luling, Texas, and ran the pimps out to sleep on the prairie—this was regarded as the toughest joint in the West, and for one man to shoot it up and get away with it was some feat.

About the time Ben was killed he was fast approaching the mad dog stage. He drank often and when in his cups he was disagreeable and dangerous. His closest friends would duck down an alley to avoid him. I also think his courage was slipping. On his way to Santone on that last day King Fisher threatened to kill him if he did not quit abusing a negro employe of the railroad. A few years earlier King would have had to make good his threats.

Mr. Wantland does not tell that shortly after the killing of Pegleg Harris by Thompson, Ben threatened to kill Billy Simms who was then only seventeen years of age. Some say that this was over a woman, but I doubt it; in regards to women I think Ben Thompson was an honorable man. Billy had plenty of courage, as has since been proven, but he was no gunman and knew he had no chance with the great Ben Thompson. His mother persuaded him to go East to avoid Ben, which he did until his mother died and he returned to Texas from Chicago to bury her. Ben saw him and told him he would not kill him while he was attending the last rites of his mother, but he repeated his intention to kill him.

The day Ben started for Santone this threat was repeated and someone sent a telegram to Billy Simms from the train warning him that Thompson was coming and meant him harm. The telegram was unsigned and some think King Fisher sent it, for King was friendly to Simms. Billy was in a near panic, but would not run. He was just eighteen, had no fighting experience and was completely overawed by the reputation of Thompson. He showed the telegram to a local judge, to Phil Shardien and to his partner Foster. He was advised to get a shotgun which he did, but there was no assurance in that, for a shotgun had not helped Mark Wilson or Pegleg Harris.

In Santone there were two different stories afloat as to the actual details of the killings. The friends of Thompson told the story of gunmen planted in the boxes, as Mr. Wantland tells it. Billy Simms, Jake Coy and others connected with The Variety hotly deny that and for reasons that I will give, I doubt very much that anyone was shooting from the boxes.

At the start of the fight Ben and King were sitting on a stairway. As Mr. Wantland says, Foster opened the ball by calling Ben a murderer and ordering him from the place. Ben drew his gun, rammed the barrel of it into Foster's lips, cutting his face and knocking out some teeth. The pain of the blow so enraged Foster that he sprung at Ben like an angry cat, at the same time drawing his gun. Coy was within reach of Ben and grappled him, preventing him from firing. Fisher reached for Ben, possibly in the role of peacemaker. A shot from Foster's gun struck Fisher in the head. At the same time Billy Simms had entered the place from outside and he did not have the shotgun; he started firing about the same time that Foster did. I think it was a shot from his hand gun that killed Ben, who was wounded and struggling with the powerful Coy. Billy wounded Coy in the hip and shot Foster in the leg. Foster was middle-aged and not strong, and died from shock and loss of blood.

Billy's pistol was empty and he dropped it on the floor and picked up Foster's gun that still had three loads in it. The nausea that often hits a man in a killing struck the boy, and he went on downstairs still holding Foster's gun. At the door he met Billy Thompson and Phil Shardien. Simms was going to kill Billy Thompson, but was prevented by Shardien. As they were talking a number of shots were fired upstairs. Later it was learned that Coy and a bartender had been firing into the dead bodies of Fisher and Ben.

The main reason I doubt the drygulching story is because of the position of the combatants. Men hidden in the balcony boxes could have killed Ben and King easily when they first entered. After the fight had started they could not have shot at Thompson without hitting their own friends. Coy was grappling with Ben, Foster had hold of Ben with his left hand, and was trying to get a shot in with the revolver, in his right hand, but Coy was in the way after the first two shots. Billy Simms was only two or three feet away and was excited. When one of his shots struck Coy, he knew it and hesitated. Coy said, "Keep busy, don't mind me."

It was no fair fight by any means. Put Fisher and Thompson back to back and they would have whipped everyone in the place that night. But it seems all the famous ones make one mistake, and one is enough. Jesse

James put too much trust in his own kin. Billy the Kid hesitated for fear of killing a friend. Wes' Hardin turned his back on a man whom he had threatened, and Ben Thompson used a gun to jab a man in the face instead of shooting him. Had Ben stepped back instead of forward into Coy's arms he might have killed all three of the men in front of him.

We can admire Ben Thompson for his courage but he contributed little to the West outside of history; he did nothing toward its progress, he was not a builder but a gambler and saloon keeper, and as such he lived off the men who were the real builders of the West.

There is a minor detail of Mr. Wantland's account which I failed to mention above. He says that Larry McLaughlin had a 30-30 carbine and this was 1885. Winchester made their first 30-30 rifle for the model 1894 rifle, but not in that year. I have not my books handy but I am quite sure it was the next year, 1895.

You will note that last paragraph. It must be very seldom indeed that any error flies its way unscathed past the Camp-Fire circle. It may escape the writer and the editorial staff, but we have wing shots in our ranks that never let that kind of bird get away alive. The error about the Winchester has been pointed out also by Henry Nonnemaker, gunsmith, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; E. L. Heiser, Clinton, Oklahoma; Charles W. Riesz, Wilmington, North Carolina, and others. Apologies to them all.

ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN—you know his good yarns, and I hope to have some of them in our pages again soon—has been seeing a lot of the world under the equator in the last year. He writes us about two of the *Ask Adventure* experts he visited along the line.

I had only three minutes. My train was heading from Wellington and towards New Plymouth. The brief stop was made at Feilding and Feilding meant nothing to me except that Tom L. Mills, *Ask Adventure* expert for New Zealand, lived there and I had wired him I was passing through. If you don't think it's anxious work trying to locate a man you've never seen before, and on a crowded platform with the seconds ticking away, well, just try it. But we made it all right, and I found myself shaking hands with an erect, wiry sort of individual, his face the healthy red the brisk New Zealand climate seems to induce; eyes a penetrating blue, and a white mustache close-cropped. Medium height. Dressed in dark serge, high stiff collar and a soft hat. And I think that about covers it except I judged him to be around fifty and was badly jolted to discover he was in his seventy-first year. Also that he was still active as the editor and publisher of the *Feilding Star*, an important paper in the heart of the sheep and farming country of New Zealand's North Island.

A native of the Isle of Man, he went to New Zealand in a windjammer when only eight years old. His father, an artificer in the British Navy, left that outfit to fight with Garibaldi, and Tom's son served with the Anzacs at Gallipoli. He says he is a man of peace himself, but I heard tales that seem to indicate he was always well able to take care of himself. He impresses you that way too, even at seventy-one, which may be accounted for by the fact that in his youth he was a great athlete, captaining football, cricket, and bowling teams.

Beginning in the job-printing department of the *Timaru Herald* in New Zealand's South Island he went through all the grades until he obtained the *Feilding Star* twenty-eight years ago, and was twice elected president of the Australian Country Press Association, the only New Zealander ever to occupy that position. By a strange coincidence he worked with Alan Foley, Australian *Ask Adventure* man, on the same paper in Melbourne years back. He is an authority on the Maoris, their history and customs, and if there is any part of New Zealand he hasn't seen (and some parts are still pretty tough) he'd like to know about it. He told me just before the train started to move that any *Adventure* fan who drifted into Feilding could be sure of three things; a table to stick his feet under; a glass to hold in his hand; and some damned good yarns to take away with him. I like 'em like that.

But the best story I heard about Tom Mills was this one, which somewhat makes me dubious of his statement that he is and was a peaceful man. It seems that back in the 90's when King Dick Seddon was Prime Minister of New Zealand he introduced Tom (then a senior reporter on the *Wellington Evening Post)* to Sir George Reid, the visiting Premier of New South Wales. "George," said Seddon, "meet my friend Tom *Hell* Mills!"

I met Alan Foley, *Ask Adventure* expert for Australia, in his office in Sydney where he now carries on a business as publishers and authors' agent. He is a big man, broad, with a ruddy face and a shock of white hair, and a hand-grip that nearly cripples you. If you ever meet him remember that and watch out for your fingers, or pretend to be busy with a cigarette or something. And I mean it.

You couldn't mistake him for anything but a real adventurer, and for a fact, he looks out of place behind a desk. Born in London, England, in 1888 he left home at sixteen to find out what made things tick, and at eighteen he was in Western Australia graduating successfully as a pick-and-shovel artist, or so he puts it. As he says himself, "Hell, I've done them all; fencing, ringbarking, clearing, dam-making and well-sinking. Fun? Everything's fun at eighteen. I was general contracting a few years later, road, bridge and railway work, mostly construction. And after that? Oh, I made a few pounds and went on the land; lost a few pounds and went off the land.

"I got kind of tired after that and quit manual labor. Sort of drifted into journalism and advertising. Sure I was good. I specialized in trade and technical journalism and even wrote books. Look here, *The Fight for Trade* and the *Text Book of Display*. How's that for a fellow who's humped his bluey and sweated with the best of them?"

I said, "Yes, Tom Mills back in New Zealand was telling me about you and about the days you worked on the *Leather Journal* in Melbourne together."

Foley's swivel chair came down with a bang. "Is that old son-of-a-gun still moving around?" he demanded. "Old Tom *Hell* Mills. Don't tell me he told you he was a peaceful man."

"His own words," I said.

"You know," said mine host, "there are times I really think he believes it." He seemed lost in admiration for a while and I ventured to inquire, "Just what do you mean."

"Oh, nothing, nothing." He waved his hand. "I was just thinking of Melbourne."

"Well, tell me," I said, "do you like this business you're in, shut up all day in an office?"

"It's a good business," he defended and I hastened to assure him I didn't doubt it. "Well," he conceded, "there are times. . . ." He didn't finish and he didn't need to. You could see what he meant in the curious wrinkling of his eyes.

"But I'll tell you," he said suddenly, "that's one thing I like about this A.A. work. When I get letters asking about this and that in the back-blocks in the Never-Never, it makes me feel good. It makes me . . . ."

"Eighteen again," I said and he laughed.

"You're wrong. It makes me damned glad I've got a soft thing now instead of swinging a pick at a hundred and twenty in the shade."

But he was a liar and we both knew it.

F. Leonard Marsland was *Ask Adventure* expert on Antarctica, where he spent ten months as an officer of Sir Douglas Mawson's Antarctic Expedition. He took on his *Ask Adventure* department in October, 1934, and his letters were among our most interesting ones, a good touch of humor along with solid information. Do you recall what he wrote about his experiences with penguins?

He had followed the sea for some years, held a British B. O. T. first mate's square-rigged ticket, made five passages around the Horn and three through the Straits of Magellan. But on going up for his master's ticket he found himself unable to pass the eyesight test, was on that account barred from the bridge of any British ship, and quit the sea.

Several of my letters to him went unanswered. Another went into the hands of a friend, T. J. Whittington of the Queensland Government Office, London. I have just heard from him:

"I regret to inform you that Mr. F. L. Marsland died at Kingston (Surrey) Hospital on the 22nd of October last as the result of injuries received during a parachute descent at Sir Alan Cobham's Air Circus on September 4th."

FROM Paul Gould, attorney, of 277 Broadway, New York City, we hear of a new germ that starts after its victim with a terrific muzzle velocity.

I write to sound a warning to your readers. Something is hanging over their heads, waiting, ready to pounce. But let's begin at the

beginning. In your cabin, or bungalow, or den, where you may have a few guns and swords hanging on the wall, don't go stringing up a few cartridges. It may sound innocuous—it may look untraplike—but you are now exposed to microbus cartridges collectus, and God help you if you are bitten. My kid and I hung up a few cartridges that way, and then added some more as we came across new varieties, and now we are foolfledged cartridge collectors. We slink around with that searching, yearning, hopeless look in our sunken eyes, the bane of the sporting goods stores, persona non grata at the cartridge companies, and even cops clutch their bullet-studded belts as we go by.

The collection has some 1050 cartridges up on charts, each cartridge separately described on a tag. They range from the tiny 2mm "parlor" bullet, shot from a sub-calibre barrel in a Luger, to the .58 Spencer. There are a number of oddities, pin-fires, tit-fires, chalk loads, steam bullets, tracers, Magnums, explosive bullets, etc. It's a hard hobby to ride; no one but a millionaire or a magazine editor(*) can afford to buy a whole box of cartridges just to get one, and going into a store to buy one cartridge is like asking Mr. Heinz to open a can and give you one bean. However, if any of the Camp-Firers are unfortunate enough to be infected, we have some fine duplicates for trade.

*This remark indicates, alas, the destructive and mind-warping effects of the cartridge-collecting hobby, and I add my own warning to Mr. Gould's.

YOU may recall a short story by Harold Titus in the anniversary issue, in which criminals fled in a speedboat across a lake covered with skim ice. The ice sliced through the hull at water-line, and the boat sank. There was argument on the staff about that story—was it possible? I had seen knife-like gashes cut by ice into slow one-lunged hulls on Chesapeake Bay, and believed with Mr. Titus that thin ice would sheer off the bottom of a craft cutting through it at high speed. Here comes a clipping from Wallace Lomoe, newspaper editor, of a tragedy at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.

A blade-like film of ice, one-quarter inch thick, that sawed its way through the sides of a motor powered rowboat loaded with five hunters at Piatt Lake, seven miles north of Strongs Village in Chippewa County, Saturday morning, was responsible for the drowning of Fred F. Shaw, 52, prominent Sault citizen, and the narrow escape of four others.

The boat sank after the ice sawed a seam through its hull, casting all five men into the water.

I'M GOING to violate a confidence and print this letter from Hapsburg Liebe. He had given advice in *Ask Adventure* to a man who wanted to canoe through the Everglades. To some of that advice exception was taken by a comrade who had made an Everglades trip. Mr. Liebe seemed to be getting the worse of it, and I'm printing his letter because it doesn't appear fair to let the situation rest that way.

I've just read the McGinty letter in Camp-Fire for January. Looks like he's trying to show the old boy up, doesn't it? But I do want to tell *you* this, which is not for publication.

In writing the *Ask Adventure* letter that McG. criticizes, I was writing of the *WHOLE* 'Glades. He's writing of the outskirts. The eastern edge of the 'glades was drained by those canals, but not the vast main body, which is so near sea level that it will never be drained, and will never be all dry. The peaty earth that takes fire and burns is always on this drained edge.

Snakes are seldom seen? My eye! I think I've seen a hundred cottonmouths on one acre down there, and I distinctly remember killing five rattlers in a mile of hunting along a ridge some three feet higher than the surrounding swamp of pop ash and buttonbush. Those west coast rivers he mentions are more sloughs, or bayous, than rivers. They're short, have no particular source, just peter out. Last time I was down there we waded a rowboat filled with camp stuff five miles because of shallow water—and MUD. This was Lostman's River. Plenty of tarpon up those short rivers in the brackish run toward more northerly waters. Also robalo (snook) and cavally (jack). All great fighters but not much edible value. I didn't see any shark.

Government charts? All right for inshore navigation. In fact, indispensable. But for the 'Glades—bah!

Now I've got it off my chest and feel a little better. So long and good luck.

Thanks go to these readers for their friendly letters:

Malcolm Webber, Pasadena, California; W. H. Hurdle, Portsmouth, England; George Hardy, Sacramento, California; G. C. Eggleston, New York City; Claude V. Birkhead, San Antonio, Texas; Lester W. Smith, Portland, Oregon; Luther H. Tarbox, Flushing, Long Island; M. H. Sandford, Winter Park, Florida; J. E. Way, London, England; Joseph Tyson, Philadelphia; W. D. Wallace, Wayne, Michigan; E. J. Byrne, Fort Worth, Texas; F. Hilton Crowe, Tampa, Florida; Frew Hall, New York City; Charles F. Teske, Steger, Illinois; G. F. Brabon, Chicago.

THIS young fellow writes us that he was a pretty poor specimen. We can't agree with that, in face of his record, except as it applied to his health. He turned his life over the way you flip a flapjack in a frying pan—let him speak for himself, Norman Lewis Giles, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, who goes to show that you never know what lies in the soul of the man on the humdrum job.

Some time ago I was a department store clerk, not quite a man but a pretty poor specimen. One day I picked up a copy of *Adventure*, you may know the number—a picture of a Legionnaire at salute, holding in his arm a pig also having one paw at a mock salute. In the Camp-Fire of that number one of your authors wrote of his life, living in the bush, canoeing, fishing, etc.

That article hit me. If one man could do that, so could I.

That same day I quit my job, bought some camp stuff and headed for the mountains. Since that day I have lived as a man was meant to live. I've spent weeks in the bush, ridden herd, prospected, been a special policeman. I have herded sheep, worked in lumber camps and road camps, made more money in a day than I made in the store in a week, yes, and lost it in an hour too!

I have just come in from hitch hiking eleven thousand miles, from the Peace River to San Diego, with miles of side trips thrown in.

You wouldn't know that pale faced department store clerk now. He is tough and brown as an Indian.

This letter is written left handed. I sprained my right hand in a fall from a horse.

If any of your readers want to know, tell them from me. Don't be afraid, chuck your safe job and little pay check and hit the road. Things will happen as they have happened before and you'll meet men and soon you will be a man.

Sorry if it sounds funny, but I'm trying to thank you.

LAST week I got into a friendly argument with a man who had asked me to dinner and sent his car.

I got into the car, and in a polite and humble way the chauffeur put a robe around my feet. Then he went to the comparative darkness of the driver's seat—I didn't notice the man particularly, wouldn't recognize him again.

My host and I got into discussion at dinner about the qualities of the average man—this is a good subject upon which you can argue forever and nobody wins or loses.

He claimed that the average man is a pretty meek fellow, too afraid of things to amount to much. I said that the average man has plenty of guts and courage, but unless there was a war on he usually had few chances to show it or even to realize it himself.

He couldn't convince me any more than I could convince him. I said:

"Pick any group of men at random—subway guard, bookkeeper, elevator operator, banker, the man who drove me up here tonight—put them in a situation that demands courage, and practically all of them will come through."

He began to laugh.

"Did you notice the man who drove you here?"

"Not at all."

"Well," he said, with a kind of proud glow, "I don't admit your argument about the other men, but that chauffeur of mine—that son of a gun cracked up five planes. His wife finally got him to promise he'd never go near another flying field, but she's afraid he will."

—H.B.

Ask Adventure

information you can't get elsewhere

WE wrote our A. A. expect on forestry for some information on the Forest Rangers. That department of the Government's activities interested us because it seemed to be a good, healthful outlet for some of the American man-power. Our expert, however, tends to be pessimistic about employment openings in the Forest organizations. He writes:

I hope you are mistaken in your belief that the publication of this information will cause a greater inquiry in my department. So many young chaps these days are looking toward the Federal Forest Service as a means of employment, and so many of them are obviously unfit, that it is an unrelished task to write discouragingly to them.

Cordially yours,

—Ernest W. Shaw.,
So. Carver, Mass.

But for general information, Mr. Shaw compiled the following outline:

Write to *The Forester*, Forest Service, Washington, D. C., for information and publications dealing with the work of a ranger. Write to the State Conservation Commission, or bureau, at State Capitals, for information on State projects.

There are only a few States having positions comparable to the Federal Forest Rangers. Among these are Pennsylvania and New York States, with a very limited number of positions. Maine has four Forest Supervisors, so called, with jobs comparable to that of a District Ranger in the Federal Forest Service. Year-long men employed in Connecticut and Massachusetts on the State Forests are called laborers.

For applications for the United States Civil Service Examination for Forest Ranger, write to the United States Civil Service Commission, Washington, D. C. The Civil Service examination is open to any one who has reached his twenty-first but not his fortieth birthday. A course in forestry is practically necessary.

The opening salary for a ranger in the Federal Service is $2200. a year. The ranger furnishes his clothing, equipment, horses, and food supplies. Tools, tents, office equipment, etc., are furnished by the Government, but where quarters are furnished by the Service, at headquarters points, a nominal charge for rental is deducted from the ranger's salary. A pension fund, available after fifteen years of service and if the age of sixty-five years has been reached, is created by a two and one-half percent deduction from the monthly salary and by the addition of a like amount by the Government. Should the official be severed from his position prior to the pension age, the amount so deducted from his salary is refunded, plus a small interest rate.

The continental United States and Alaska is divided in nine Regional Administrative Districts in charge of nine Regional Foresters, with about five hundred technical, administrative and clerical assistants attached

to their headquarters. Within these nine districts there are one hundred and forty seven National Forests on which are employed one hundred and forty five supervisors, one hundred and three assistant supervisors, and approximately seven hundred and fifty rangers. In addition most supervisors have the assistance of technical men, clerks and stenographers.

Most State Agricultural Colleges offer courses in forestry, some of the best known being Michigan Agricultural, Nebraska Agricultural, and Colorado Agricultural. I know of only one State Ranger School, the New York State Ranger School at Wanakena, N.Y. Almost all the State Colleges and Universities offer courses in forestry. Oregon State, Universities of Washington, Minnesota, Michigan, Arizona, Maine at Orono, Yale, Harvard, and Columbia, to mention a few of the well known. The State College of Forestry at Syracuse, N.Y., is spoken of favorably.

Ask your librarian for books pertaining to forestry. Such as Cary's *Manual for Northern Woodsmen*, University Press, Cambridge, Mass. Chapman's *Forest Management*, J. B. Lyon Co., Albany, N. Y. Graves' *Forest Mensuration*, Am. Forestry Assoc., Washington, D. C. Pinchot's *Primer of Forestry*. Also bulletins on various forestry subjects issued by the Department of Agriculture.

Adventure would like to hear from a Forest Ranger or two. What does your day's work consist of? And what about some of the things not in the day's work?

Tell us what preparation you feel is necessary for your job.

Write in to Camp-Fire—we'll be glad to hear from you.

CURL your shoulder at an overhand right.

Request:—What is the best defense against a hard, fast, straight, left hand jab? Against an overhand right? What are the best diet and exercises to toughen the stomach? One more—how may I secure a Amateur Boxers A. A. U. card?

—Robert Veler, Mt. Clemens, Mich.

Reply by Capt. Jean V. Grombach:—The best defense against a left jab is to pick off with your right hand—palm out, padded side of glove toward your face, or slipping just out of reach.

The best defense against a right overhand is a straight left jab keeping left shoulder properly curled so that right overhand will slip off, hitting you on the side of the head or behind the neck, instead of on your jaw.

As to diet: eat plenty of vegetables, along with your meals . . . meat, potatoes, salad and vegetables.

To toughen the stomach, do body or floor work. Work with the medicine ball.

Go to the nearest Y. M. C. A. or A. A. U. office or branch, or ask the athletic coach of some neighboring college or university where the nearest A. A. U. chapter is and then apply there for your A. A. U. card. It will cost about twenty-five cents.

A GOOD sea chest barked no shins.

Request:—Can you describe for me an "old time" seaman's chest? What was the sailor's equipment? What do you think is the best compass for navigation?

—Billie Fellion, Malone, N. Y.

Reply by Mr. Charles H. Hall:—The seaman's chest was a wooden box with a hinged lid. It was about thirty to thirty-six inches long, about twenty-two inches wide, and twenty inches high. Some of them were a good bit smaller. The chest had blocks under the corners or cleats to keep the bottom off the deck and the best ones had sloping fronts and backs—narrower on top than on the bottom, to save the sailor's shins when the ship heeled in a seaway. At each end was a block of wood, sometimes the entire depth of the chest, with a hole through it for the becket by which it was carried and lashed in place. These beckets were fancy jobs, braided up into all kinds of "bosun's delights" as such work was called.

As for the compass, most American navigators prefer the liquid compass, in which most of the weight of the card is floated by a mixture of alcohol and water. Some dry compasses of British manufacture are excellent also. Nowadays the navies of the world and the big liners have gyroscopic compasses which are not affected by the ship's magnetism.

CHOKE damp is carbonic acid gas, or $C O_2$.

Request:—I understand that upon entering caves and shafts that have been closed for some time, a person is likely to find them filled with dead air. Just what is dead air? Is it merely an air that contains no oxygen? If so,

it seems to me that a person entering it would have a chance to escape before being overcome, because there is an excess of oxygen in the body. Am I wrong?

Is there any chance of a cave or shaft that is open being filled with this air? Is there any safe way to test the air before entering such a cave?

I don't know if this is a gag or not, but some of the old prospectors out in Arizona told me that, while blowing fresh air into a cave, using a small motor driven air pump, pieces of ice would blow out of the end of the hose which is connected with the blower. Is this true? And if so, please explain how ice can form in an air hose in the desert where the temperature is something like 125°.

—W. C. Woodall, New York, N. Y.

Reply by Mr. Victor Shaw:—The "dead air" to which you refer, found in dry, abandoned mines or other shafts, or in certain natural caves, is merely carbonic acid gas, or choke damp, the same as the expelled human or animal breath. It will not support life because it has too little oxygen. Moreover, when inhaled, it decomposes the haemoglobin of the blood. It is a very dense, colorless gas, one and a half times as heavy as air, and can be poured like a liquid from one container to another. This is the reason it settles in abandoned shafts, etc.

It will not support combustion, and has been used, highly compressed, to extinguish fires. Hence a simple test is to introduce a lighted candle, or match, which will be put out at once if there is enough gas present to make it unsafe to breath.

Its density makes it settle to the bottom of shafts and caves, and few have more than a layer of it, with fresh air above. Some rooms in the Mammoth Cave had a waist-high layer, so that a man could walk all right, while a dog would die of suffocation quickly. The famed Dog Grotto near Naples is like that, and dogs brought in are made insensible in a few seconds, while human visitors suffer no inconvenience.

But there need be no cover to induce formation of the gas, which settles naturally if the place isn't used. Also, since water absorbs it, a wet shaft or cave isn't likely to hold it. Neither is a cave with a floor that slopes toward the entrance, as the gas would flow out. It can be easily drawn out by suction, or expelled by a forced air current in any ventilating pipe system. Mines are ventilated for this reason.

The formation of the ice by an air compressor is no "gag". I've had my air drill freeze many times under same conditions. When air is compressed for such use, much heat is generated, so air compressors are cooled by water jackets. When the compressed air is released there is instant and very intense evaporation, which lowers the temperature at the exit very often to below freezing point. In fact, this principle has been used in some ice machines. Of course, the compression used in ventilating a mine, or in an air drill, is not high enough to form ice in excessive amounts, merely a bit of frost.

RIDE 'em, cowboy. And there's no leather to pull on a surfboard!

Request:—*Ask Adventure* correspondents seem to be qualified to answer questions on all sports except surfboard riding. I have been unable to find anything published on the sport: the theory, the make up of the Hawaiian boards, and the methods of using the boards. I will appreciate any data you can give me on this sport.

—Frank E. Carlton, Jr., Jacksonville, Fla.

Reply by Mr. L. de B. Handley:—I do not pretend to be an expert on surfboards, specializing on swimming, but I will do my best to furnish the requested information.

Surfboard riding is based on the principle of gravity. A wave moving toward shore presents an incline and any floating object caught in its path is raised by the oncoming swell and immediately starts to slide down said incline, due to the force of gravity, thereby moving forward, as well. If the object is itself moving forward at sufficient speed, and does not offer much resistance to the water, it will continue to slide down the advancing incline and keep ahead of the wave, naturally maintaining the same pace as the latter.

The surf rider stretches flat on the board, head toward shore, and at the approach of a "good" wave propels himself as fast as possible, using the hands and arms for paddles. Once he has "caught" the wave, with the board skimming rapidly before it, he may, if skilled in the art, stand up on the board, even perform acrobatic feats. It is possible to steer the board right and left by shifting the weight to the side one wishes to go. The outward trip, to beyond the surf line, is made flat on the board, using the arms for propulsion.

Surfboards are being used very successfully in the rescue of the drowning, nowadays. The lifeguard paddles out to the person in danger, lifts him, or her, on the board, then

paddles back, in much faster time than possible in a swimming rescue.

The Hawaiian surfboards are cigar-shaped and vary materially in size and material. Duke Kahanamoku, the famous Honolulu swimmer and surfer, once told me that the boys in Hawaii built their own boards as a rule, adapting them to individual requirements and personal ideas of length and weight, employing half a dozen kinds of wood.

A comparatively new type of surfboard, constructed like a boat, hollow inside, has grown in favor lately. It is the aristocrat of boards, very light, beautiful, and exceptionally fast. It is known around here as the Blake board. This board is manufactured by the Robert Mitchell Manufacturing Co., of Cincinnati, Ohio. It is of mahogany, and a friend told me recently he had been quoted a price of $25.00.

At Jones Beach State Park, New York, the lifeguards use, among others, a surfboard made of balsa wood, solid, extremely light. This wood can be obtained from the Balsa Wood Co., 158 Pioneer Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

For the ordinary Hawaiian board you may write to the Hawaiian Paddle Board Co., of Venice, Cal., which handles them extensively and no doubt can provide any further information you seek.

MR. DAVIS QUINN, *Ask Adventure* expert on birds, reports that he has received many inquiries on various phases of falconry.

Here is an answer covering most of the points.

It is not possible to condense the subject of a whole book into the space of a letter, but I shall try. First of all, it is easier to train an eyess (young hawk) than the adult. But don't take him from the nest till fully feathered and just ready to fly. As hawks are generally rare today, do not remove more than a single individual from a nest; and by all means take care not to otherwise disturb the nest or its occupants. (During the last few years our birds of prey have been so ruthlessly persecuted that now every effort must be made to prevent their imminent extermination.)

Place your young hawk in an empty, warm, dry room. Immediately feed him lean, raw beefsteak, thin-sliced. If this food is offered quietly on the end of a pencil, the bird should take it. Feed thus punctually three times daily. Be most careful at all times not to alarm the bird. Hawks are among the most sensitive and highly-strung of creatures; but if you remember this, your eyess should soon be feeding out of your hand.

In a few days he will be ready for hacking; that is a period of about one month during which he is allowed his freedom, to develop and strengthen his wings. But before freeing the bird, feed him on the lure till he knows it. (This device will be described presently.) Then some morning early, when he has fed lightly, free him in sight of the lure. He'll not go far, and will soon return to eat the food attached to the lure (part of a fresh-killed pigeon, for example). Such food must be well tied on to the heavy lure so that he does not learn to "carry" (fly away with it). This is a bad habit to break. Furthermore, a trained hawk flying off with his food is hard or impossible to get back. When at hack, your eyess must learn to eat on the ground.

Of course, while flying about at liberty during this period, the young hawk may instinctively catch and kill a live, wild bird and discover such prey is edible. It then becomes necessary to catch him, as most likely he will not return voluntarily. Best gadget for this is some form of live trap, or a No. 0 steel trap with padded jaws, or a bow-net. Another thing, there is so much bitter propaganda among gunners today that what few wild hawks remain alive seem to be shot on sight. Alas, there is great danger of such a fate for your eyess during hacking. But that is the chance you take, till wiser sportsmen demand better laws to protect our birds of prey.

At completion of hacking, a new period in the training begins. If your bird is taken when adult, its training begins at this time. The furniture of falconry makes its advent here.

The rufter hood, used on newly caught birds, is a cape of soft leather fitting well over the head, tying in back; it has an opening, well-fitted also, to allow the bill and nares to protrude outside for breathing and eating. This hood is not easy to make. It must fit correctly, not too snug, nor too loose, and its shape must conform to the bill at the opening. This hood is later replaced by the common hood, a similar affair, except that it is constructed of heavier leather, with more elaborate fastenings, and sports a plume to serve as a handle in taking it off and putting it on. As both these hoods are rather a problem to manufacture at home without considerable experience, it is recommended that they be purchased from K. Mollen, North Brabant, Valkenswaard, Holland, who deals in falconry furniture. I understand his prices are reasonable.

The jesses consist of two light leather straps, one of which is fastened around each tarsus. Both jesses are joined to a common swivel through which the leash (a tough, light strip of leather) is passed. The falcon is tied to your wrist or to its perch or block by the leash, but watch in doing this to prevent tangles that might cause injury to the bird. Each jess will be about six inches long for a duck hawk, longer for a larger bird, say eight inches for a gyrfalcon, and the leash will, of course, be somewhat longer. The swivel often consists of two rings joined on a pivot. A very small jess may fasten a tiny bell to one tarsus close above the regular jess. This bell must be very light but loud enough to be heard a mile. In the short-winged hawks, the bell is often fastened by means of a special jess between two of the middle tail-feathers.

Now you break your bird to the hood. If it is a wild-caught adult, do not put it in a cage; no creatures are more wild or spirited than hawks, and a captive would soon break its neck or at least its feathers through impetuous flight under this type of confinement. Place him rather in a dark room. Put on the rafter hood, and feed lean, raw beefsteak soon as possible after caught. Blinded by the hood, you stroke him lightly with a wing or a feather. He will strike out, a signal for you to place a morsel of meat in his mouth. Accompany this action simultaneously with a particular chirp or whistle or call. He will soon develop a conditioned reflex for this sound, and associate it always with food.

Carry the hooded hawk about with you constantly on a gloved hand. If you can do this all day, for several days, so much the better. The very best way to tame and discipline a bird as wild as a falcon is persistent carrying on the hand.

Feed, always, three times daily, but do not overfeed. It is well to substitute the lean meat with parts of whole chickens or pigeons; feathers, bones and all. All birds of prey regurgitate indigestible residue in the form of pellets. Do not feed the next meal till he has thrown up his pellet from the last.

When he shows signs of taming, change to the common hood. This is done in *absolute* darkness. Now deprive him of food for about twenty-four hours. At the end of this time, place appetizing fresh food under his feet and gently unhood him in a room with a candle lit in the far end. Either hood him or darken the room before the meal is finished, and take care at this step not to let him realize he is a captive yet.

Next, make the room dim, and practice assiduously, for *hours* and *hours*, hooding and unhooding. Feed occasionally, and stroke him gently during the while, to help overcome any possible resentment he may manifest. Continue this treatment till he is used to it and suffers you to place and remove the hood at will.

Gradually, at feedings (you will observe that this is the best time for all progressive steps in the training) you will unhood him, first in artificial light, then outdoors in twilight, etc., till finally he feeds quietly in broad daylight. Make each one of these meals last as long as possible. An unplucked chicken wing is excellent—it will take him a half hour to pluck and eat it.

You may now begin to introduce him to strangers, dogs and other objects with which he should grow familiar—all while feeding. If he shows over-interest, draw his attention back to his food by your particular call or by a tug on the food in his talons. Be ever on the alert to avoid seriously alarming him. Make him feel at home in your human environment. And invariably hood him before the meal is done.

Remember that a bird with a good appetite is easiest to teach. Don't starve your hawk, but keep his appetite good, even at the cost of a little loss in weight.

All this while he is, of course, fastened by leash, to his perch or preferably to your wrist! He may develop a habit of "bating", or attempting to fly off, when so leashed. To break this, place him on a block on the lawn where he can fall in the soft grass.

Now he must learn to come to your glove. This is best done when he is perched on a polished rod that curves abruptly down, near your hand. As he approaches to obtain the food you hold, he will slide down the curve and instinctively leap to your glove. Increase the distance at each try, till you finally have him fly from a fence post outdoors to your wrist, still tied to the leash, of course. And here is another tip. In the beginning, never allow your hawk outdoors except in the best wind and weather. Favor him studiously with every break in this respect.

The lure: a small weight covered with leather, with pigeon's wings attached. It must be too heavy for him to fly away with. Cover the lure conspicuously with food and cast it before your still-leashed bird. He will go for it, of course. Do this at greater and greater distances, substituting for the leash a piece of string (attached to the swivel and jesses). Swing the lure so he can see it, a couple of times, before throwing it down. A tiercel (or male peregrine) has been taught to come to the lure in six lessons. Soon he begins to detect it the moment it is brought out, and

comes unerringly from considerable distances. It is then safe to omit the string, and give him his freedom.

At this point it is well to have an assistant to unhood and release your hawk from a distance, while you cry your familiar call, swing the lure, then hide it, causing the bird to mount up to obtain a better view. Then, just as he pounces, jerk the lure away, making him swing round for it once more. Next time he'll look sharper. Soon he'll become so good you can't jerk it away.

Perhaps your chief object is to get him to hover or "wait on", at as high a pitch as possible. He is taught this by hiding the lure at longer intervals each day, although some birds are a problem on this point. Often they may learn to wait on, if an assistant displays a lure from a hilltop while you brandish a second lure from a low point; let him catch only the low lure. He learns to associate his success with climbing up and swooping swiftly down.

All through the training period, and after, the most essential thing is to keep your bird in topnotch condition. Training hawks, the same as other animals, is mainly through the appetite, but patience, gentleness and care count for more than much. Don't ever starve your bird beyond the normal hunger he might endure between feedings in a state of nature. Feed him the very best meat and fowl you can secure. Allow your bird plenty of exercise; he is a vigorous creature and demands it to keep fit.

You will note that every lesson in the training is carefully graduated. Gradual progress is the key. Even humans must learn new games slowly, and too often need persistent teachers. Hawks are intelligent creatures. And, like all complex, living mechanisms, hawks will vary individually in character, even among birds from the same nest. There are no two alike in disposition, size, food habits, courage or amiability. It is the falconer's job to measure the personality of his bird and adjust the training accordingly. Perhaps the single universal attribute of these birds of prey is a well-developed brain that enables them to learn a lesson skillfully taught; and this once learned, they do not forget.

For the purposes of the falconer, a hawk thinks of but one thing at a time. When scared, of the object of its fright; when hungry, of food. If you can just have your bird think of the right thing at the right time, you will have no trouble managing him.

A properly developed conditioned reflex—the sound of your shout that he associates with food—will bring him to you out of the sky, against his eagerest passion for freedom. That is, if he is flown correctly and at the right time.

The hawks indigenous to America, eligible for falconry, are approximately analogous to those in use in this sport in the Old World. These are generally grouped into two classes. (1) The long-winged, dark-eyed hawks (falcons): gyrfalcons, duck hawk, pigeon hawk, sparrow hawk; (2) the short-winged hawks: goshawk, coopers, and sharpshin. Females are often preferred because of their larger size. The first group is held in higher esteem among falconers because they are generally smarter and so easier to handle and work with, and also they are superior on the wing.

The swoop of a peregrine is incredibly swift, and is known to sever the head of a grouse. This fine bird swoops past the fastest duck (blue teal) as if the duck were standing still. For such prowess, the duck hawk is reputed among some to be a bloody assassin, but to those who know, this is false. He is the gentlest of creatures. In the wild, as a rule, he strikes only when hungry (a characteristic that many of our "sportsmen" would do well to follow. Who can eat five ducks?). In fact, a peregrine may fly through a flock of pigeons and not harm one. And when well trained he is even affectionate, and may be carried on the bare hand confidently.

I know of no dealers in hawks in the United States. The falconer must first learn which hawks are protected in his state; if he seeks a protected species he had best obtain permission from the state conservation department to trap it or collect it from the nest; then let him go into the woods and try his luck. An aid to such procedure would be the study of the life history and habits of the species sought (available at the public library in some good book covering the birds of the locality). At least, one would then know when and where to look.

The best all around book on the subject is *The Art and Practice of Hawking*, by E. B. Michell, 1900, published by Menthuen & Co., 36 Essex St., W. C., London, England. There appears also an excellent article in NATURAL HISTORY, March-April, 1925, *Training of a Hawk*, by Levy, to which I am indebted for many of the above notes. The *Encyclopaedia Brittanica* contains an account under the title, *Falconry*, well worth reading.

Falconry is a tedious business, and not to be recommended to those short on patience (or leisure either). But to him who is willing to earn an intimate appreciation of our most fascinating group of birds, the reward is worth the effort.

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Old-Time Sailoring—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Oriental Magic and Effects—JULIEN PROSKAUER, 148 Lafayette St., New York, N. Y.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. No. 3, Box 69, Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns: *foreign and American makes; wing shooting*—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care of *Adventure.*

★**Skiing and Snowshoeing**—W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Small Boating: *skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Soccer—MR. BEDA VON BERCHEM, care of *Adventure.*

Stamps—DR. H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Avenue, Denver, Colo.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y. C.

Swords: *spears, pole arms and armor*—CAPT. R. E. GARDNER, 1354 N. 4th St., Columbus, Ohio.

Tournament Fly and Bait Casting—H. B. STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, Box 163, Jenkintown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—CHARLES B. CRANFORD, School of Education, New York University, Washington Square, New York, N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUSS, 2722 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American; north of the Panama Canal; customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Automobiles and Aircraft Engines: *design, operation and maintenance*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care of *Adventure.*

Aviation: *airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachute gliders*—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

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★New Zealand; Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge St., Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Cardross," Suva, Fiji.

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(Continued on page 125)

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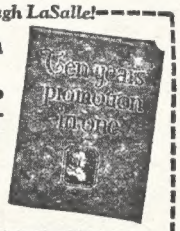

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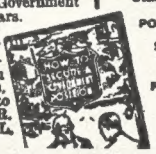

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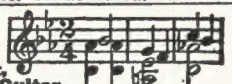

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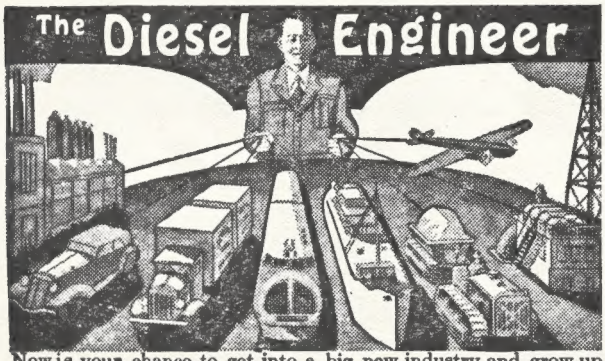

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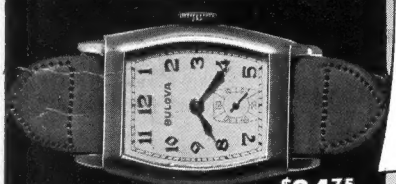

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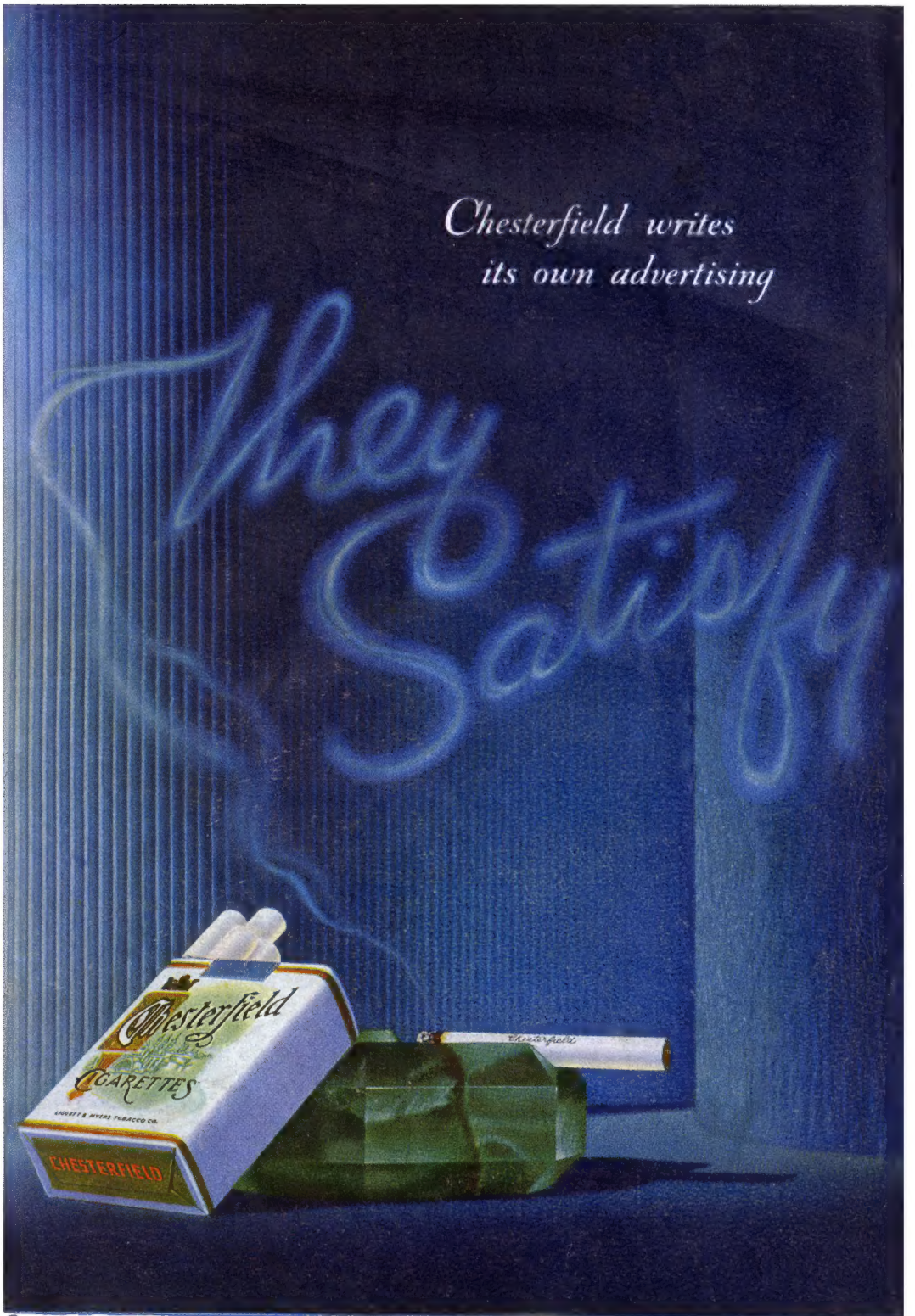

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